NOBODY KNOWS THIS WORLD BETTER

SEPTEMBER 2015 • ₹150 • VOL. 4 ISSUE 3

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER INDIA

2015 TRAVELLERS' CHOICE tripadvisor

INDIA'S BEST TRAVEL MAGAZINE

WINNER OF TRIPADVISOR'S TRAVELLERS' CHOICE AWARD 2015

TRIPS for the Modern Family

EDGY STAYS, ADVENTURE HOLIDAYS, AND LAID-BACK TRIPS FOR FAMILIES OF ALL AGES



THAILAND OLD BANGKOK | FRANCE LAVENDER FIELDS FOREVER | AMSTERDAM TAKE THE KIDS ALONG

OYSTER PERPETUAL YACHT-MASTER 40



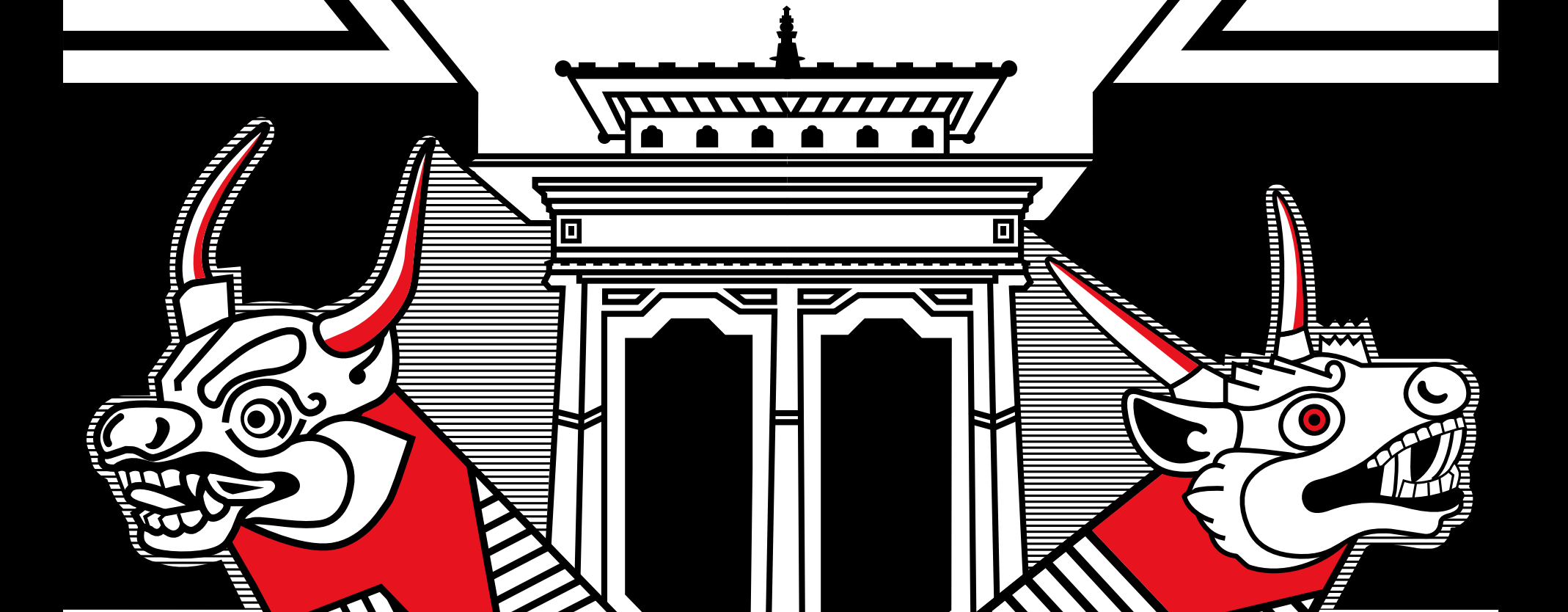
AHMEDABAD, LUXURY TIME – 079 2646 9797 **BENGALURU**, ABARAN – 080 2359 8600 & 080 2359 8888 **BENGALURU**, ETHOS SUMMIT ROLEX BOUTIQUE – 080 2211 3976 **CHANDIGARH**, TALWAR JEWELLERY HOUSE – 017 2270 5151 **CHANDIGARH**, TALWAR WATCH CO. – +91 172 4028500 **CHENNAI**, THE HELVETICA ROLEX BOUTIQUE – 072 9991 1158 **CHENNAI**, THE HELVETICA – 044 2846 4096 **COCHIN**, SWISS WATCH BOUTIQUE PRIVATE LIMITED – 91420 91420 **COIMBATORE**, ZIMSON – 0422-4371234 **GURGAON**, KAPOOR WATCH CO. – 012 4466 5500 **HYDERABAD**, MEENA JEWELLERS – 040 6746 7760 **INDORE**, PUNJAB JEWELLERS – +91 731 4005111-222 **KOLKATA**, EXCLUSIVE LINES ROLEX BOUTIQUE – 033 2282 5245 & 033 2287 0921 **KOLKATA**, EXCLUSIVE LINES – 033 2290 4116 **PUNE**, CT PUNDOLE & SONS – 091 7350 003250 & 020 2634 3685 **MUMBAI**, DIA – 022 2204 2299 **MUMBAI**, SWISS PARADISE ROLEX BOUTIQUE – 022 2833 9991 **MUMBAI**, TIME AVENUE ROLEX BOUTIQUE – 022 2651 5757 **NEW DELHI**, COOKE & KELVEY – 011 2331 4095 **NEW DELHI**, ETHOS SUMMIT – 011 4058 8700 **NEW DELHI**, KAPOOR WATCH CO. ROLEX BOUTIQUE – 011 4699 0000 **NEW DELHI**, KAPOOR WATCH CO. – 011 4134 5678, 011 4653 6667 & 011 4676 7777 **ROLEX WATCH CO.PVT LTD MUMBAI** – 022 6625 3600 **WWW.ROLEX.COM**



ROLEX

START OUT FROM SILIGURI. FINISH IN THIMPU. 1348 KILOMETRES OF RIDING.

TO SIGN UP, VISIT ROYALENFIELD.COM/TOB OR WRITE TO US AT
RIDES@ROYALENFIELD.COM




ROYAL ENFIELD
TOUR OF
BHUTAN
2015
SEPT 19-27, 2015
ROYALENFIELD
ROYALENFIELD
@ROYALENFIELD









TWO IS BETTER THAN ONE





2015 TRAVELLERS' CHOICE

tripadvisor®

TRAVEL MAGAZINE



WE'VE WON FOR THE SECOND TIME!

TRIPADVISOR TRAVELLERS' CHOICE AWARD 2015

INDIA'S FAVOURITE TRAVEL MAGAZINE



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER INDIA

HENK BENTLAGE/SHUTTERSTOCK (PRAIRIE DOG), HUNG CHUNG CHIH/SHUTTERSTOCK (MONKEYS), BOB BENNETT/GETTYIMAGES (CHIMPANZEES), MOMENT/GETTYIMAGES (ANTS), PHILIPPE BOURSEILLER/GETTY IMAGES (MACAQUES), JONATHAN HARROD/ HEGEHOG HOUSE/GETTY IMAGES (TREN), TUI DE ROY/GETTY IMAGES (IGUANA)

2015 TRAVELLERS' CHOICE tripadvisor
INDIA'S BEST TRAVEL MAGAZINE
WINNER OF TRIPADVISOR'S TRAVELLERS' CHOICE AWARD 2015

SEPTEMBER 2015

CONTENTS

VOL 4 ISSUE 3

GREAT TRIP IDEAS

66
9 WAYS TO SLEEP AROUND
Can glamping be eco-friendly, are Indian hostels really clean, and how to navigate the big, bad world of Airbnb—our traveller's field guide to the new world of lodging
By Margaret Loftus & Others

76
ADVENTURES IN WONDERLANDS
Don't just see the world, seize it. Sixteen ways to raft, hike, dive, and climb your way into earth's beating heart
By Kate Siber

86
TAILORED TRIPS FOR THE MODERN FAMILY
The family vacation, like the concept of family itself, has evolved. However you define your kin, we have an itinerary that's all relative

JOURNEYS

94
SAVING OLD BANGKOK
A new coat of paint and a new lease of life for ramshackle buildings transformed into guesthouses
By Daisann McLane
Photographs by Susan Seubert

106
THE ESSENCE OF FRANCE
Lavender fields forever: It looks like Provence and smells like Provence—but the crowds are few in France's Drôme Provençale
By Christopher Hall
Photographs by David Bacher



MICHAEL WHEATLEY/ALL CANADA PHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES

76
Emerald Lake, British Columbia, Canada

HYUNDAI | NEW THINKING. NEW POSSIBILITIES.



ELEGANCE. INSIDE, OUT.



• Cruise Control • Front Ventilated Seats • Vehicle Stability Management • All-black Interiors with Leather Seats • Projector Headlamps with LED Guide Light • Powerful 1.8L Petrol and 1.6L Diesel Engines • Best-in-segment Mileage of 22.7 kmpl* (Diesel)

ELANTRA

DESIGNED TO EXCEL

Terms & Conditions apply. *Mileage under standard test conditions, as certified by ARAI. In executive segment. Features & specifications as shown may not be part of standard fitment & are subject to change without prior notice. Hyundai urges you to follow traffic rules-these are meant to keep you safe on roads.

REGISTERED OFFICE & FACTORY: SRIPERUMBUDUR TALUK, TAMIL NADU-602105. PH: 91-44-47100000 **MARKETING & SALES HEAD OFFICE:** JASOLA, NEW DELHI-110076. PH: 91-11-66022000 **REGIONAL OFFICES: CENTRAL:** NEW DELHI-110044 PH: 91-11-66379503. LUCKNOW-226001 PH: 91-522-6714600 **NORTH:** CHANDIGARH-160101 PH: 91-172-6605000. JAIPUR-302001 PH: 91-141-6635555 **SOUTH:** CHENNAI- 600032 PH: 91-44-42204600. HYDERABAD-500082 PH: 91-40-64631130-32 & 43. BANGALORE-560010 PH: 91-9900033162. COCHIN-682024 PH: 91-8129602012 **EAST:** KOLKATTA-700091 PH: 91-33-40060045-51. GUWAHATI-781006 PH: 91-361-2237891-94. RANCHI-834008 PH: 91-651-6550152/53/54 **WEST:** MUMBAI-400093 PH: 91-22-61693900. AHMEDABAD-380058 PH: 91-79-69000025. BHOPAL-462003 PH: 91-755-6733800. PUNE-411028 PH: 91-020-66320500 **CALL CENTRE**: 1800114645, 09873564645 **www.hyundai.co.in**

INNOCEAN-059/15





VOICES

20 Tread Softly
It's time to alter our perception of what makes a good holiday

22 Book of Hours
An illustrated telling of the legend of the Sahel Hunter's Shirt

24 Clan Rules
Can a grandparent's past bring joy to the next generation?

NAVIGATE

26 Rising Star
Where in the world is Košice? And why you should take the time to visit

28 Postcard
Srinagar is healing from last year's deluge—and it needs all the help it can get

30 Go Now
Celebrating Vincent van Gogh, minus the absinthe

32 Around the World
The planet's most celebrated dragons, and where you can meet them

34 Taste of Travel
Forks at the ready: A quick guide to Melbourne's food scene

40 Super Structures
The mystery of Borgloon's disappearing church

42 Tech Travel
Five apps to make your travels more fulfilling

44 Book Extract
A book of colonial paintings for glimpses of 18th-century India



On The Cover
A mother and her two children explore the island of Mykonos in Greece. Its reputation as a party place is legendary, but Mykonos is also great for lazy, family brunches punctuated by dips in the Aegean Sea. The island's most iconic structures are its snow-white windmills, some of which date back to the 16th century.

REGULARS

12 Publisher's Note
14 Editor's Note
16 Notebook
122 Inspire
128 Strange Planet



48 The Insider
Buenos Aires hums round the clock, from morning coffee to late night tango

SMART TRAVELLER

59 Money Manager
Pancakes, doll museums, and bike rides. Who says Amsterdam isn't child-friendly?

64 Checking In
Edgy, pod-style accommodation that brings you closer to nature

SHORT BREAKS

Stay

116 A two-day digital detox in the Kashmiri village of Kullan

118 Uran offers a quick, fuss-free getaway from high-octane Mumbai

119 On the Kovalam coast, luxury and relaxation come in a traditional tharawad house

120 Slowing down to get ahead at a wellness retreat near Rishikesh

JAVIER LARREA/AGE FOTOSTOCK/DINODIA (MUSEUM). PHOTO COURTESY: POLPERRO (FOOD). EFRANS LEMMENS/GETTY IMAGES (PERFORMANCE ARTISTE). BLUEORANGE STUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK (COVER)



Swiss Travel Pass offers more this autumn: Explore Switzerland by train, bus and boat with a 4-day pass and get an extra day free, or with an 8-day pass and get two days free – valid only for travel between 12th September and 30th November 2015. **MySwitzerland.com/rail**

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER INDIA

Editor-in-Chief NILOUFER VENKATRAMAN
Deputy Editor NEHA DARA
Senior Editor NEHA SUMITRAN
Associate Editor KAREENA GIANANI
Associate Editor-Special Projects DIYA KOHLI
Features Writer RUMELA BASU

Art Director DIVIYA MEHRA
Photo Editor CHIRODEEP CHAUDHURI
Associate Art Director DEVANG H. MAKWANA
Senior Graphic Designer CHITTARANJAN MODHAVE

Editor, Web SEJAL MEHTA
Assistant Editor, Web SAUMYA ANCHERI
Features Writer FABIOLA MONTEIRO
Features Writer KAMAKSHI AYYAR

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELER U.S.
Chief Content Officer CHRIS JOHNS
Editor In Chief, Travel Media MAGGIE ZACKOWITZ
Executive Editor NORIE QUINTOS
Creative Director JERRY SEALY
Director of Photography DANIEL R. WESTERGREN
Deputy Art Director LEIGH V. BORGHESANI
Senior Photo Editor CAROL ENQUIST
Production Director KATHIE GARTRELL
Contributing Editors ANNIE FITZSIMMONS, CARL HOFFMAN, RAPHAEL KUDUSHIN, KATIE KNOROVSKY, MARGARET LOFTUS, RUDY MAXA, JOYCE MAYNARD, PETER MCBRIDE, ANDREW NELSON, EDWARD READICKER-HENDERSON, JONATHAN B. TOURTELLOT

INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE PUBLISHING
Senior Vice President, International Media YULIA P. BOYLE
Director, International Magazine Publishing & Business Development ARIEL DEIACO-LOHR

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY
President & CEO GARY E. KNELL
Chief Legal Officer TERRENCE B. ADAMSON
Chief Media Officer DECLAN MOORE
Executive Vice President Global Corporate Partnerships CLAUDIA MALLEY
Explorers-in-Residence ROBERT BALLARD, LEE BERGER, JAMES CAMERON, WADE DAVIS, JARED DIAMOND, SYLVIA EARLE, J. MICHAEL FAY, BEVERLY JOUBERT, DERECK JOUBERT, LOUISE LEAKEY, MEAVE LEAKEY, JOHAN REINHARD, ENRIC SALA, SPENCER WELLS

AD SALES
Senior Vice President (National) ERIC D'SOUZA (+91 98200 56421)

Mumbai
Assistant Account Director (Print & Online) RAHUL SINGHANIA (rahul.singhania@ack-media.com)
Key Account Executive PRIYA SINGH (priya.singh@ack-media.com)
Consultant-Account Director CHITRA BHAGWAT (chitra.bhagwat@ack-media.com)

Delhi
Deputy General Manager (Print & Online) RAJ MANI PATEL (rajmani.patel@ack-media.com)
Key Account Manager AAKANSHA DEOPA (aakansha.deopa@ack-media.com)
Consultant JASWINDER GILL (jaswinder.gill@ack-media.com)

Bengaluru
Account Director (South) S.M. MEENAKSHI (sm.meenakshi@ack-media.com)

Chennai
Consultant SHANKAR JAYARAMAN (shankar.j@ack-media.com)

Eastern Region
Authorized Representative JAIN ENTERPRISES, Kolkata (033 22488257; bcjain@vsnl.com)

Scheduling
Assistant Manager SANDEEP PALANDE (sandeep.palande@ack-media.com)

CORPORATE SOLUTIONS GROUP
President SANJAY DHAR (sanjay.dhar@ack-media.com)
Manager P.M. ARUN (arun.pm@ack-media.com)

ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES TEL: +91 22 49188811, advertise@natgeotraveller.in
SUBSCRIPTION ENQUIRIES TEL: +91 22 40497435/37, subscribe@natgeotraveller.in

EDITORIAL ENQUIRIES NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER INDIA
Unit No. 201 & 202, Sumer Plaza, 2nd Floor, Marol Maroshi Road, Andheri (East),
Mumbai – 400 059, India. mail@natgeotraveller.in
RNI NO. MAHENG/2012/51060
Printed and published by Mr. Vijay Sampath on behalf of Amar Chitra Katha Pvt. Ltd.
Printed at Manipal Technologies Ltd., Plot no 2/a, Shivalli Village, Industrial Area, Manipal-576104 and Published at Amar Chitra Katha Private Ltd., Unit No. 201 & 202, Sumer Plaza, 2nd Floor, Marol Maroshi Road, Andheri (East), Mumbai – 400 059.
Editor: Ms. Niloufer Venkatraman.
Processed at Commercial Art Engravers Pvt. Ltd., 386, Vir Savarkar Marg, Prabhadevi, Mumbai-400 025.

ACK MEDIA
Chief Executive Officer VIJAY SAMPATH
CEO - Publishing MANAS MOHAN
Chief Financial Officer DEEPAK RATHI
Senior Vice President (Operations) M. KRISHNA KIRAN
Business Head RITIKA BASU
Senior Executive Subscriptions KASHISH KOCHHAR
Dy. General Manager (Legal & Licensing) LALIT SHARMA
Production Head SAGAR SAWANT
Assistant Manager Production PRASAD JADE

IBH BOOKS & MAGAZINES DISTRIBUTORS
Director ABIZAR SHAIKH
Senior Manager HEMANT BIRWADKAR

Disclaimer All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or part without written permission is strictly prohibited. We do our best to research and fact-check all articles but errors may creep in inadvertently. All prices, phone numbers, and addresses are correct at the time of going to press but are subject to change. All opinions expressed by columnists and freelance writers are their ownand not necessarily those of National Geographic Traveller India. We do not allow advertising to influence our editorial choices. All maps used in the magazine, including those of India, are for illustrative purposes only.

About us National Geographic Traveller India is about immersive travel and authentic storytelling that inspires travel. It is about family travel, about travel experiences, about discoveries, and insights. Our tagline is "Nobody Knows This World Better" and every story attempts to capture the essence of a place in a way that will urge readers to create their own memorable trips, and come back with their own amazing stories.

COPYRIGHT © 2015 NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER: REGISTERED TRADEMARK ® MARCA REGISTRADA.

Not saving this issue? Then please recycle.

THE DREAM TEAM



From left to right: **Deepak Rathi, CFO; Abizar Shaikh, IBH-Director; Eric D'souza, Senior Vice President-Ad Sales; Diviya Mehra, Art Director; Niloufer Venkatraman, Editor-in-Chief; Ritika Basu, NG Business Head; Manas Mohan, CEO-Publishing; Sagar Sawant, Production Head ; Sandeep Shivdasan, E-Commerce Business Head; Krishna Kiran, Senior Vice President-Operations; Kashish Kochhhar, Senior Executive-Subscriptions; Sanjay Dhar, President-Corporate Solutions Group.**

This team is living the dream—of running the country's best travel magazine. Thus my slightly different take on the cliché!

The team, standing proudly under a banyan tree (aka the tree of knowledge) is also an awfully well educated team—we have an editor with a PhD, a CFO who's a CA, business heads who are engineers or computer geeks or MBAs, and the youngest in the team is our subscriptions manager with an M.Com. degree! The point is that the best-in-class create great products. Much is made out of college drop-outs making it big in our world, but let's not forget that 99 per cent of the time, it is an erudite, hard-working team that makes a great brand.

So, if you love what's written inside the magazine, or the fact that it's available at more places than any other travel magazine, or that the advertising in it and for it is wonderful, it is because of the team that you see in the yellow frame up there. And, behind the scenes, there is the larger editorial team that strives to ensure this magazine remains the best in the business.

More than 90,000 of tripadvisor.com's readers have voted *National Geographic Traveller India* the best travel magazine in the country—for the second time in a row. It's a standing ovation that is richly deserved. ●

Cheers,



Manas Mohan
CEO – Publishing
ACK Media

PS: Missing from the picture are Vijay Sampath, CEO, ACK Media, and Neha Dara, the magazine's Deputy Editor... because they are *TRAVELLING!*

NEEL PAUL


Queenstown
100% PURE NEW ZEALAND
newzealand.com
LET THE LAND OF GOLD LEAD YOU TO
HIDDEN TREASURES
Let Queenstown's stunning vistas work their magic on you. Hike through Mount Aspiring National Park to witness the Southern Alps in all their pristine glory. For a more leisurely stroll, head for the serene shores of Lake Wakatipu. You can even plan a treasure hunt to Arrowtown - a quaint historic settlement by the Arrow River which bears gold even today. Afterwards, spend time exploring the city's dynamic culinary scene. Come, experience something new around every corner.
EVERY DAY A DIFFERENT JOURNEY

RECONNECTING WITH THE PAST



It's amazing how much is remembered of a forgotten past when you revisit a place of fond memories

For over a year I'd been trying to plan a weekend trip to Bangalore to visit my elderly aunt and uncle. It finally happened in August. They live in the historic neighbourhood of Malleswaram, where I had spent a few school summer vacations. Though I'd been to Bangalore once in the interim, I had only gone to places like M.G. Road, now unrecognisable from my childhood, but not to the neighbourhood where I had stayed and roamed on a bicycle with my cousin.

Taking a 7 a.m. walk around Malleswaram on a Sunday, I was surprised to find distinct traces of the old Bangalore. When I visited it as a young girl, it was a middle-class neighbourhood with a mainly Tamil population. Though it's more cosmopolitan now, much of the old survives. Leafy one-way streets still have old bungalows and the corner near my aunt's home still has a flower-seller, with framed pictures of Hanuman up on the tree near him. I saw young and old returning from temples with grey *vibhuti* on their foreheads. Across from their old house, Veena Stores is unchanged. It sells fluffy idlis and people are still happy to stand on the pavement and eat.

In the feisty IT hub that Bangalore has become, I expected to see more of India's Silicon Valley, the world of start-ups and microbreweries and malls. But in the middle-class Tamil Malleswaram, where masks of rakshasas still ward off the evil eye before construction of a house begins, I caught a glimpse of different world. A space where smartphones and iPads, Facebook and Twitter, have little or no role to play.

More than all the tangible signs I saw, it was staying in this traditional neighbourhood and watching the ins and outs in my uncle and aunt's home that was eye-opening. This is a world that I sometimes forget still exists. A world of strong community bonds, where neighbours drop by all the time. Where some of the closest friends an elderly couple in their 80s have, are people half their age who visit almost every day. Among the visitors to their home that I met, was a man in his early 40s, who lip-read and spoke so well that I learnt he was deaf only after he left. More significant, however, was what I heard next: He works in a bank, earns a salary of ₹45,000, and spends over half of it on charitable causes every month. I don't know anyone his age who works in a bank or in any other job, with that kind of commitment to humanity.

It's amazing how much you remember of a forgotten past when you revisit a place of fond memories. And that's how I spent most of my weekend: Recalling incidents, laughing over the follies of childhood, remembering long-forgotten relatives and playmates. I discovered my uncle is an avid travel magazine reader. "Even if I can't go to these places myself, I can read the stories and transport myself there," he said with a laugh. Once he gets his knee replacement surgery done, he hopes to travel to Leh by road since he's heard so much of the spectacular journey. From long hours chatting with my aunt who is in her early 80s, I learnt what she wants to do, who she wants to help, the plans she has once she's more mobile. This from a lady who met with a major road accident a year ago, in which she broke both legs with multiple fractures. "Whatever negative incidences, like the accident, happen." she said, "I feel sad for a short while and then I mentally move on. There is a lesson in everything and I'd rather understand that and learn something than mope around."

In the modern, westernised world, we try to derive positive thinking by turning to self-help books and sometimes to new-age versions of religions. Here, I saw that my aunt too gets her spirit from reading, but she reads the Vedas and traditional Indian philosophies passed down through various traditions. Wherever I travel I like to notice people's attitude to the situation of their lives. I particularly like to observe what people do when life serves up a few lemons. It's clear that in this traditional Bangalore neighbourhood there is much positive thinking. For my aunt and uncle, it is ingrained in their personalities. Partaking of it, and enjoying this positive energy and zest for living a good life, was what made this weekend trip a real delight. ●

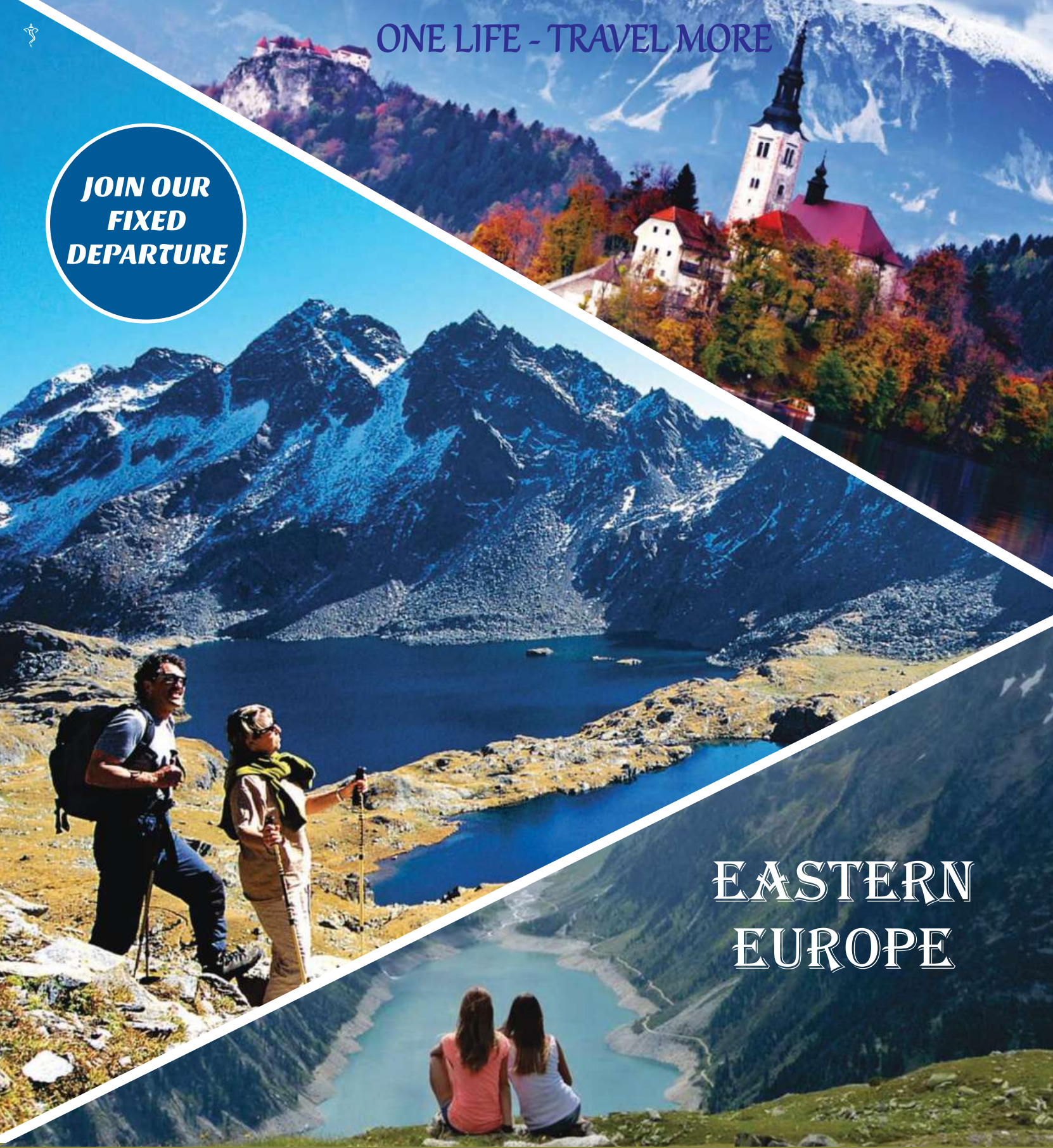


Niloufer Venkatraman

NILOUFER VENKATRAMAN

OUR MISSION

National Geographic Traveller India is about immersive travel and authentic storytelling, inspiring readers to create their own journeys and return with amazing stories. Our distinctive yellow rectangle is a window into a world of unparalleled discovery.



IATA | Accredited Agent

International Offices

USA | UK | Singapore | Hong Kong

Website: www.fiestavacations.co.in

Email: info@fiestavacations.co.in

Corporate Office

#18 (Old No. 109), Hari Brindhavan,
8th B Main, 30th Cross, 4th Block,
Jayanagar, Bangalore - 560 011

Phone: 080-4900 4800 Fax: 080-4900 4899

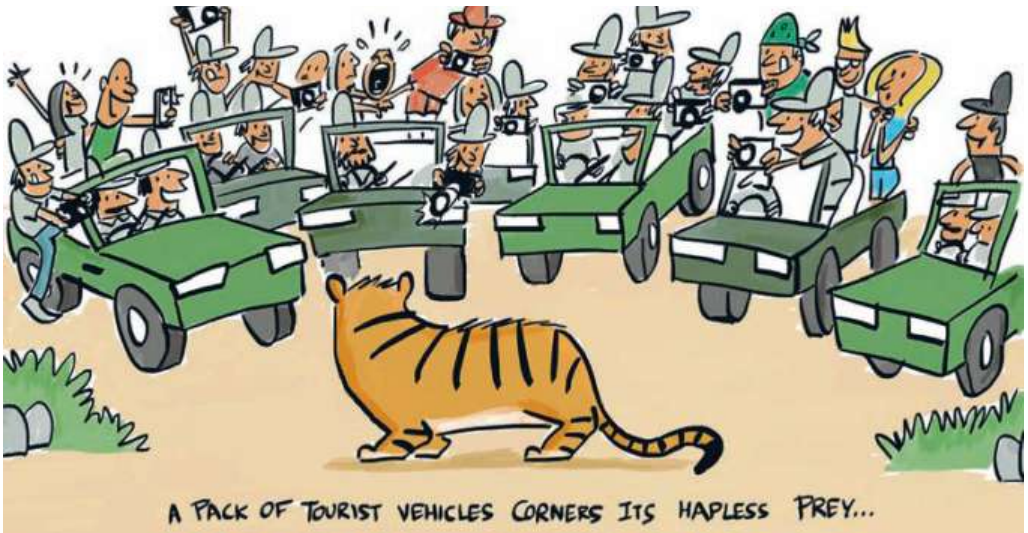
Fiesta Vacations®
ONE LIFE - TRAVEL MORE

@NATGEOTRAVELLERINDIA @NGTINDIA FACEBOOK.COM/NATGEOTRAVELLER.INDIA 1,97,231

BEST OF THE WEB

Into the Wild

To observe International Tiger Day (29 July 2015), wildlife enthusiast and illustrator Rohan Chakravarty sketched the scene of a jungle safari from the striped cat's point of view, highlighting the dark side of tiger tourism. *See Web Exclusives>Travel Sketches*



BEYOND GUIDEBOOKS

Fabiola Monteiro writes about Paris and Barcelona, and how keeping your eyes open leads to spectacular discoveries.

See Web Exclusives>Staff Blogs

CRAFT BEER GUIDE

We've got the scoop on 12 of India's best craft brews, recommended by three beer enthusiasts and connoisseurs.

See Web Exclusives>Guides

IN PHOTOS

Chase the monsoon along the Konkan coast, from the beaches of Canacona, Goa, to temples in Udupi, Karnataka.

See Web Exclusives>Get Local

GO TO NATGEOTRAVELLER.IN FOR MORE WEB-EXCLUSIVE STORIES AND TRAVEL IDEAS.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Perfect catch

I have made several attempts to get a picture of the spot-billed pelican scooping up fish from water, catching its food in its large, expandable throat pouch. These water birds also fish for their young ones who await the catch in their nests. It was only recently, during my trip to the Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary in Karnataka's Mandya district that I finally got the perfect shot of the spot-billed pelican.
—Uday Kiran



Correction In the story titled "Licence to Thrill" (August 2015) the section Dangerous Curves Ahead on page 105 had an incomplete last line. It should have read: "Inside Track: From the Argentine side of the tunnel, drivers can glimpse 6,962-metre-high Mount Aconcagua, the tallest peak in the Western hemisphere."
In the same issue, on page 36, the story "Joy Ride" incorrectly states that the PressPlay app is available to iOS devices. It currently works only on Android devices.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER Meetup BE PART OF THE CONVERSATION

Keep It Quiet

At our last MeetUp on **Quiet Places**, we had our Editor-in-Chief **Niloufer Venkatraman**, NGT Editor, Web **Sejal Mehta**, and sound designer **Ayush Ahuja** on our panel. Here are some tips from the experts and the audience:

- Forests are not quiet by definition, but they're just the kind of quiet we need. They allow us to merely observe and not necessarily participate, a far cry from our city lives.
- Switch your phone off on a holiday and don't think of your emails or texts. Accept with humility that the world gets on fine without you.
- Try scuba diving. All you can hear is your own breathing, which is meditative, and the faint sound of fish chomping on coral.
- Record sounds on your travels to relive the memories later. It will transport you back to that time and place.
- Ditch the buzzing hotel and live in a monastery. Try caving in Meghalaya to mute all sound.

NEXT MEETUP:
11 September 2015, 7-8.30 p.m.
Venue: Title Waves bookstore, Bandra (West), Mumbai.

ROHAN CHAKRAVARTY (ILLUSTRATION), UDAY KIRAN (BIRD)

LOOK OUT

The Travel Scrapbook



In April this year we launched NGT's **The Travelling Scrapbook**, a book that is passed from traveller to traveller. Each person leaves notes, doodles, and memories in its pages. Features Writer Fabiola Monteiro took it with her to Spain and passed it on to someone she met there. So far, the scrapbook has been tracked to Paris and Amsterdam, and is now on its way to Germany. If you find the book, take a photo of yourself with it, and of what you write inside. Email it to *web.editor@natgeotraveller.in*, tweet us at @NGTIndia or tag us on Instagram with @natgeotravellerindia.

INSTAGRAM OF THE MONTH

Train to Wonderland



Deputy Editor **Neha Dara** took this photograph of the train she rode from Wengen to Grindelwald, both Alpine villages in Switzerland's Bernese Oberland region. Wengen is a small car-free village, while Grindelwald is dotted with picture-perfect wooden chalets. The journey is dominated by views of Jungfrau, the region's best-known peak. The black-and-white pattern on the train evokes the traditional Swiss craft of paper cutting, or Scherenschnitte, in which reindeer and cows climbing snow-topped Alpine slopes dotted with wooden chalets are popular motifs.

FOLLOW @NATGEOTRAVELLERINDIA ON INSTAGRAM

NGTINDIA@WORK

Food That Binds



Among the things I love about homestays, is the access it grants me to the host's kitchen. I'm a curious cook and there's nothing I love more than scoring local spices and recipes. In Komic, the highest habited village in Asia (in Himachal Pradesh's Spiti Valley), I stayed with Yonden Dolma. Sitting next to my host with her rosy-cheeked children and toothless mother, I had my first momo-making lesson. For dinner, we had potato dumplings flavoured with onion blooms I'd picked earlier that day and a broth of peas and spinach harvested from Dolma's garden. It's been over a year since my visit, but I still feel a swell of gratitude every time I use my stash of dried onion blooms—even though I still can't make the perfect momo.
—Senior Editor, Neha Sumitran

THE FIND

The Right Way

On a recent visit to Trivandrum, Kerala, I went to a makeshift market run by women. While pottering around piles of scarves and kathakali magnets, I spotted a circular brass box buried under a pile of faux sandalwood letter openers. I asked the seller what it was. "*Khaali dabba,*" she said.

I saw to my delight that it had the title of the famous Beatles' song, "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" engraved on the lid. Hesitantly, I shook it and heard it jangle. Inside, lay the funkiest compass I ever saw. The lyrics of another Beatles classic, "The Yellow Submarine" were etched on the inner side of the lid. There was no way I was going to let this one go.
—Features Writer, Kamakshi Ayyar

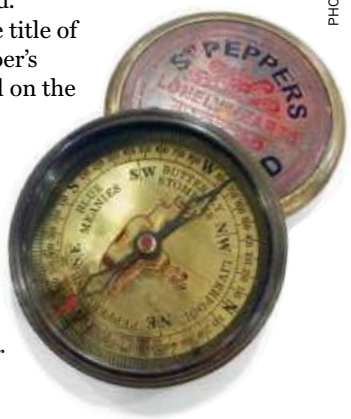


PHOTO COURTESY: SELMIN EDA ÖRENAY (SCRAPBOOK), MILAN MOUDGILL (MOMOS), NEHA DARA (TRAIN), NEHA SUMITRAN (COMPASS)



AVAILABLE FOR: **DATSUN:** DATSUN GO I **FIAT:** PUNTO I **GM:** CHEVY BEAT/AVEO-UVA/SPARK I **HYUNDAI:** i10/GETZ/SANTRO/EON I **MARUTI:** ALTO/ALTO K10/ZEN ESTILO/A-STAR/ESTEEM/SWIFT/SWIFT D'ZIRE/WAGON–R (O)/RITZ I **TATA:** INDICA

MRF ZLX is available at all MRF T&S outlets MRF FRANCHISEE MRF Exclusive showrooms MRF Exclusive and MRF Authorised dealerships MRF

Visit us at www.mrftyres.com I For further assistance, contact: write2us@mrfmail.com I Like us at https://www.facebook.com/mrfcorporate Follow us at www.twitter.com/MRFWorldwide

Changing Expectations

IT'S TIME TO CHANGE OUR VIEW OF WHAT MAKES A GOOD HOLIDAY GETAWAY



Mike Pandey
is a conservationist and wildlife filmmaker. He has won the Green Oscar three times.

I watched a 24-hour time lapse video shot from a satellite in space charting air traffic across the world. Earth looks like an overactive beehive with billions of people and goods criss-crossing continents and oceans. We seem to be generating a carbon footprint that has overwhelmed the planet's resources.

I love to travel, but I often wonder whether its toll on the planet can be reduced. Many other travellers also worry about the same thing, which is why eco-friendly tourism and sustainability are the new buzzwords. As conservation-conscious citizens we want to make more careful, discerning choices.

We can begin by evaluating what we want from a holiday. Usually, we want to flee urban hustle and bustle, and escape to the countryside, by the sea, to the mountains, or the wilderness. That means it is the natural environment we value. So it follows that we should choose a property that coexists with the environment without changing it adversely. Steer clear of properties that interfere with water bodies, change the existing topography of the region, or use building materials harmful to the environment. In jungles, look for places that don't interfere with an animal corridor. Huts and tents are not only eco-friendly they are aesthetic and blend into the forest or the seaside without being an eyesore like a large concrete building.

For example, one of my favourite getaways in Kenya where I grew up and return often, was a resort where most of the huts were on treetops and some on stilts 20 feet above ground. This ensured that human presence did not interfere with the free movement of animals in that area. I recently read about something similar in Kerala, where visitors can stay in treehouses built using eco-friendly, locally available raw materials like bamboo, hay, and coir. They are based on "erumadum" huts traditionally built by the tribes in the area, and the locals were involved in their construction. Located in rainforests, they offer only basic comforts but allow guests a chance to really enjoy the area's natural beauty. They are located in a number of destinations across Kerala, including Wayanad, Idukki, Thekkady, and Munnar (*www.ecotours.in/tree-house.htm*).

Next, we need to think about what we want from the resort. Clean, comfortable rooms with good service and food are essential. But do we really need a hotel with a swimming pool in the middle of the jungle? Or high-pressure showers at a hill station where water is at a premium in summer? It is only when we, as travellers, stop demanding such facilities and measuring how good a resort is by them, that the properties will not feel the need to offer them. Let us instead value resorts that emphasise enjoying the natural environment.

Another area where we can significantly reduce our carbon footprint is through the food choices we make when we travel. Not only is opting for food that is locally grown and sourced a more sustainable choice, it also enhances the travel experience.

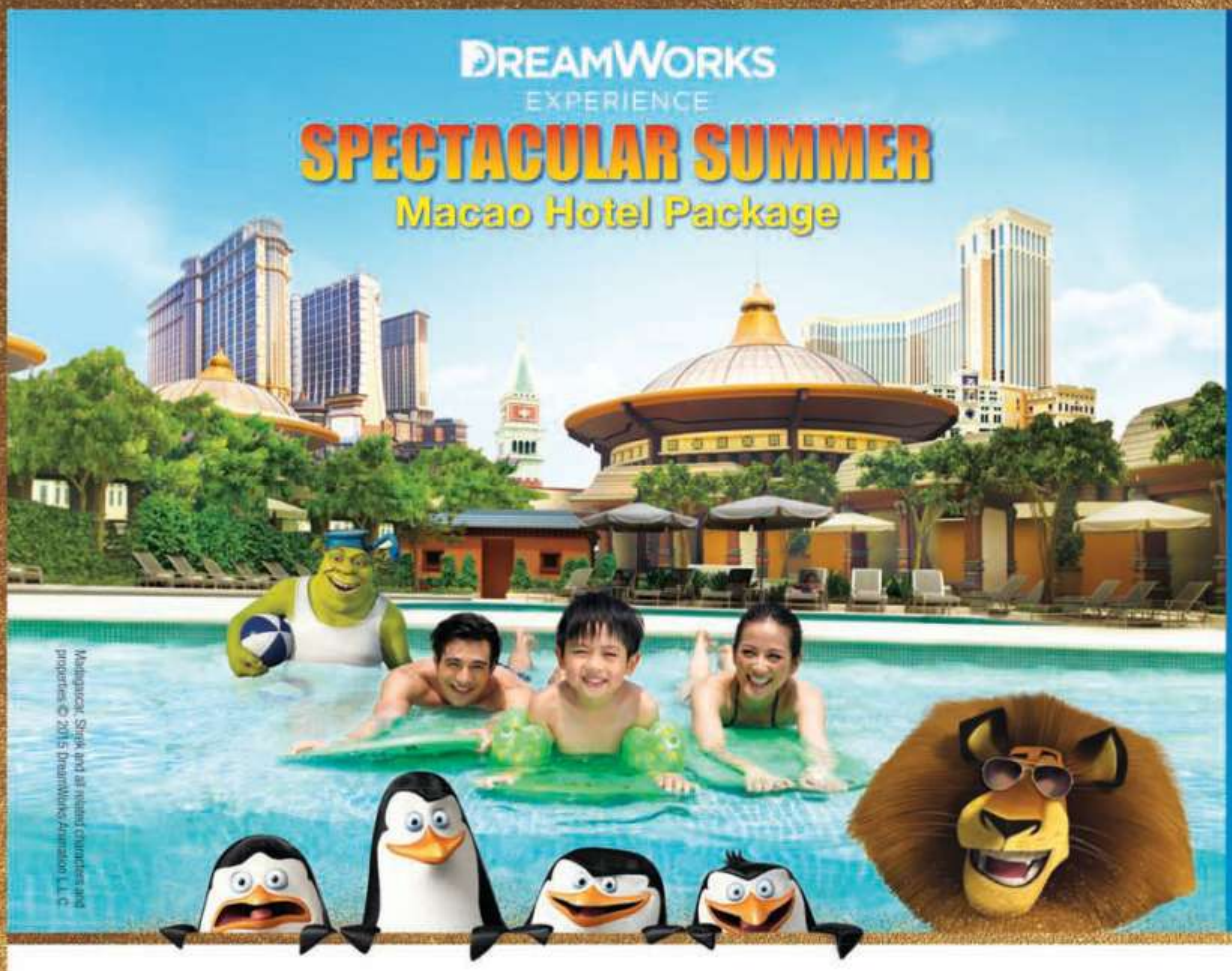
A great example of a resort that has started to implement some of these ideas is the Corbett Ramganga Resort in Jim Corbett National Park, now operated by WelcomHeritage. In recent years, the property which is spread over 20 acres near the park's northern boundary at Marchula, has added eco-friendly huts. These are built using traditional techinques provided by local craftsmen and masons using jute mats and stone sourced from the area. Most of the water used on-site is recycled and filtered, and this includes water for the swimming pool and garden. Manure is made from biodegradable waste and used in the resort's organic vegetable patch spread over two acres. The remaining waste is processed and taken to a garbage collection centre. Most of the staff comes from the neighbouring villages and is trained to be careful about the surroundings. There is no wireless connectivity except in a small area. The only sound you hear is birdsong and the gurgling music of the Ramganga River. Rooms are neat and the facilities are sparkling clean and comfortable. The minimalistic, local approach enables the tariff to remain within reach. The river runs pristine and clear without a sign of plastic debris or broken beer bottles (*ramganga.com*).

There is lot that needs to be done and we can start by making sustainable vacation decisions and supporting eco-friendly hotels. This will go a long way in reducing our debt to the planet. ●



Tranquil Resort, Wayanad, Kerala

OLAF KRÜGER/IMAGEBROKER/DINODIA



THE VENETIAN MACAO

CONRAD MACAO, COTAI CENTRAL

假日酒店 Holiday Inn MACAO COTAI CENTRAL

Sands RESORTS

Holiday Inn Macao Cotai Central

2 Nights / 3 Days

₹ 18,000* Per Person

Inclusions:

- Accommodation in King Superior Room for 2 nights
- "Shrekfast Character Breakfast with the DreamWorks Gang!"
- Upgrade 2nd Day breakfast to Madagascar Summer Feast with the DreamWorks Gang
- MOP300 Shopping and Dining Dollars per room
- One way Hong Kong Airport – Macao Cotai Water Jet Cotai Class ticket
- One way Macao – Hong Kong Cotai Water Jet Cotai Class ticket
- DreamWorks Plush Toy

The Venetian Macao

2 Nights / 3 Days

₹ 23,000* Per Person

Inclusions:

- Accommodation in Royale Suite for 2 nights
- Daily breakfast for two guests at Cafe Deco
- Upgrade 2nd Day breakfast to Summer Feast with the DreamWorks Gang
- MOP700 Shopping and Dining Dollars per room
- One way Hong Kong Airport – Macao Cotai Water Jet Cotai Class ticket
- One way Macao – Hong Kong Cotai Water Jet Cotai Class ticket
- DreamWorks Plush Toy

Conrad Macao Cotai Central

2 Nights / 3 Days

₹ 28,000* Per Person

Inclusions:

- Accommodation in King Deluxe Room for 2 nights
- Daily breakfast at Grand Orbit
- Princes Fiona's Summer Tea Set at Conrad Lounge
- MOP 1,100 Shopping and Dining dollars
- One way Hong Kong Airport – Macao Cotai Water Jet Cotai Class ticket
- One way Macao – Hong Kong Cotai Water Jet Cotai Class ticket
- DreamWorks Plush Toy

PRICE INCLUDES: Accommodation per person on Twin Share, valid for travel before 30th Sept 2015 with Shopping and dinning dollars. Return ferry ticket in standard class. PRICE EXCLUDES: Air ticket, Insurance, GST of 3.50% payable to Govt. of India. Rates are applicable for stay from SUN to THU only. Conditions Apply

Scan this QR code to connect with the Travel Expert

CALL: 1800 22 1235, 1800 209 0400, 98675 65599

SMS: VM to 5757513 www.coxandkings.com

COX & KINGS FLEXIHOL TAILOR-MADE HOLIDAYS

The Hunter's Shirt



AMRUTA PATIL
is the author of graphic novels Kari and Adi Parva. Book of Hours chronicles an hour spent here, there, elsewhere.

Mali, Senegal, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Gambia. Countries touched by the West African tropical hot steppe share belief in an elite, secrecy-sworn brotherhood of hunters ('donson ton'). Scant wildlife of the Sahel means hunting isn't top priority for the hunters; not becoming prey to the Bush is. They seek to become allies of the land, not conquerors. The wisest will learn to turn unforgiving sand into sustenance, spiny vegetation into pharmacopeia. The hunter's ceremonial shirt is a prized part of many a museum collection, but it will not yield all its secrets.



ANAËL SEGHEZZI (AMRUTA PATIL)

Connecting the Dots

CAN A GRANDPARENT'S PAST BRING JOY TO THE NEXT GENERATION?



Aditya Daftary
is a Mumbai-based radiologist who likes to wander. While in the city, he spends more time on his bicycle than in his car, and hopes that soon family vacations will also be the same.

Ever since we relocated to India from the U.S. in 2006, we've heard an incessant barrage of negative judgements about our decision. What could possibly have convinced us to do such a thing, most people wonder, when half this country wants to do exactly the opposite? Questioners have often probed me, offering their own stereotypical reasons from "visa problems" to "job issues" to "wife didn't like it?" I would reply with big-picture, philosophical reasons, because few people could understand that it was very simply what my wife and I wanted to do.

With all that questioning, there have been occasions in the last nine years, despite everything being perfectly fine, when I too have wondered why we came back. Though I may have verbalised long explanations to the sceptics, for me the move back was for much simpler reasons. One of these was put into perspective during a family holiday.

Three years ago, we had made plans to travel to Rajasthan for the Diwali break. My wife, daughter, and I were taking my in-laws, who are incidentally also our neighbours in Mumbai, along on the trip.

For months before the journey, my daughter, and her grandfather had been discussing in great detail the home where he grew up in Sadri village, a stone's throw from Rajasthan's famous Ranakpur temple. My father-in-law was part of a Marwari trading family that included parents, three brothers, and two sisters. He explained to her that it was a home without electricity, where he had brought his new bride, and to which she would carry pots of water on her head from the local well.

Our Rajasthan trip began in Udaipur at a wonderful homestay. We enjoyed the expected beauty of the city's palaces, lakes, and the Maharajah's vintage car collection. We drove to Chittorgarh and Kumbhalgarh forts where I relived my school history texts. The historical details my wife and I remembered were further enriched by my father-in-law's deep knowledge of the region he was from. In particular he gave us an alternative view: Of how Marwari traders had made Rajput valour possible through financial support, though the history books have not really provided any recognition of this role.

Our six-year-old daughter was enthralled by these practical lessons in history. Like a sponge she seemed to be absorbing everything her grandfather narrated, posing the kinds of questions only someone that age can. While she found it all interesting, what she eagerly awaited was the detour to Sadri.



No one lives in my father-in-law's ancestral home in Sadri now. It's still looked after by him and his siblings and had been recently painted and cleaned. As the door of the house opened, no camera could capture the look of delight on both their faces. For my six-year-old, everything she had pictured suddenly came alive: her great-grandfather sitting on the *otla* watching the village go by, her great-grandmother in the kitchen preparing meals for her large family over the *sigri*. She reached to open an old Monaco biscuit tin and found a lump of sugar still in it. She marvelled at all the old-style suitcases, which the family must have used travelling back and forth to Bombay, where they later moved. She spun the stone *chakki* at which her grandmother had ground spices as a young bride. It was better than any amusement park she could have visited.

My 70-year-old father-in-law turned six himself, behaving as if he had just brought his best friend home. Forgetting the rest of us, he took his little granddaughter to every corner of the house. They held hands and climbed the staircase to the terrace. She was given a special tour, with an extended stop at the room where he and his wife had lived after they were married. From his window he pointed out Kumbhalgarh fort in the distance, a place he had longed to visit as a child. Nothing could quite match their combined awe when he showed her his cupboard, a small hole in the wall measuring about 2x2 feet and barely a foot deep. "Everything I owned in the world fit in this," he said, "and I shared it with my brother."

On this journey it became even clearer to me why we moved back to India. When I think back to all the logical explanations I've spewed about our returning, few make as much sense as this one. That we returned here to turn back time and connect two best friends. ●



ADITYA DAFTARY







Explore the serene blue lagoons and private beaches on the sunny side of life. Watch the dawn break to thesound of waves dashing on a shallow reef, serenading you to a relaxing holiday in paradise. The more adventurous sorts will delight in the plethora of activity our island resorts offer; and those seeking a tranquilhaven, will discover serenity at its best in paradise. Stay with us and renew a promise bound to the island asyou discover yourself.

Endless experiences are yours to explore on the sunny side of life!

• Adaaran 'Prestige' Vadoo • Adaaran 'Prestige' Water Villas • Adaaran 'Select' Meedhupparu
• Adaaran 'Select' Hudhuranfushi • Adaaran 'Club' Rannalhi

VISIT MALDIVES YEAR 2016

ADAARAN
MALDIVES

T: +96 03 323 323 F: +96 03 315 237 E: marketing@adaaran.com.mv www.adaaran.com

NAVIGATE

30 **GO NOW**
How to celebrate van Gogh's work on his 125th death anniversary

34 **TASTE OF TRAVEL**
A quick guide to Melbourne's food scene

40 **SUPER STRUCTURES**
The mystery of Borgloon's disappearing church



Hlavná Street courses through the oldest part of Košice, Slovakia.

E.J. BAUMEISTER, JR./ALAMY

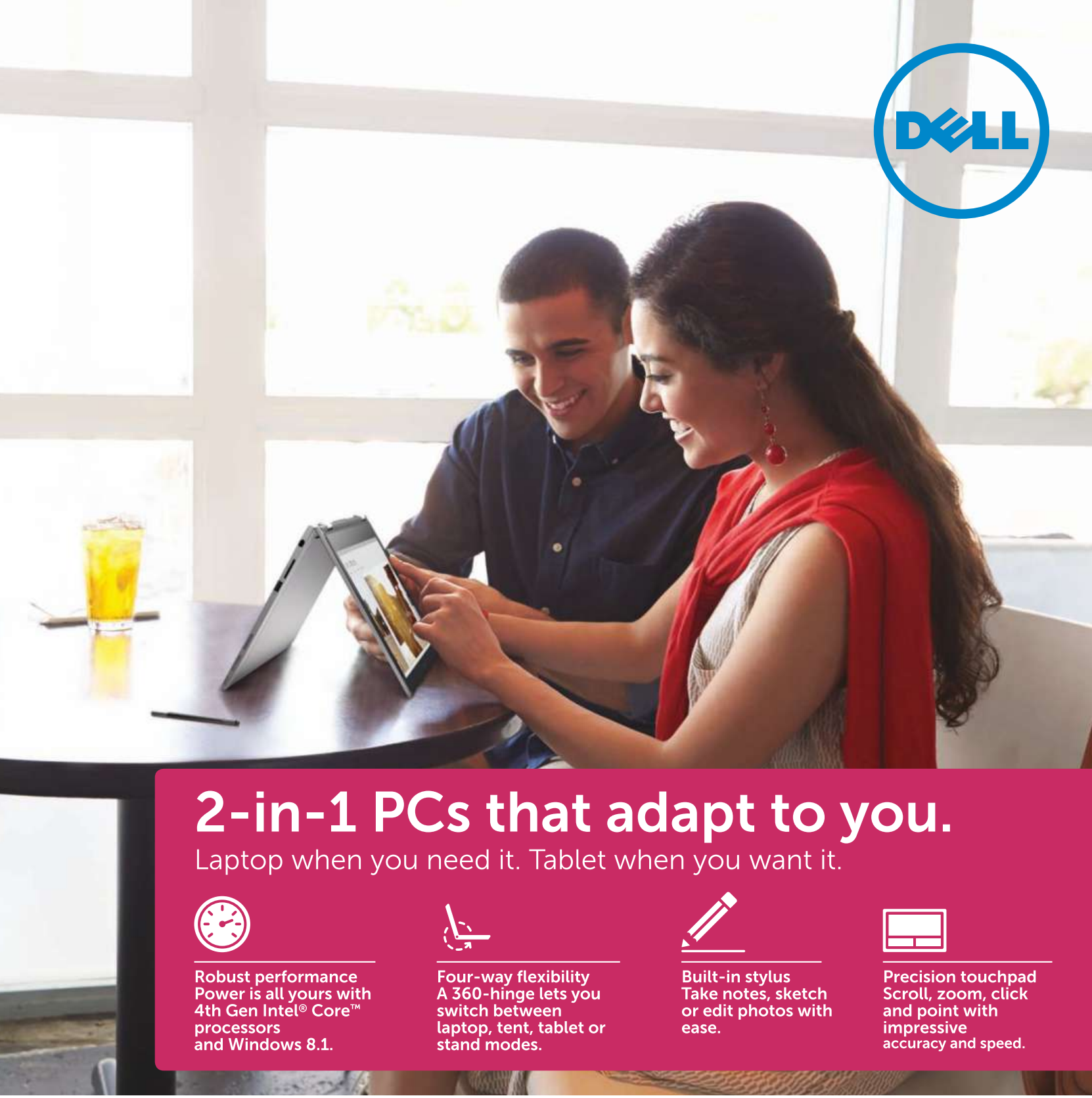
The Wonders of Košice

SLOVAKIA'S SECOND CITY IS ONE OF EUROPE'S RISING STARS BY KIMBERLEY LOVATO

A trading hub during the Hungarian Empire, the city of Košice (KO-sheet-seh) has a heritage as motley as the architectural styles of its medieval old town. In 2013, Slovakia's second largest city stepped out of the shadows as Europe's eastern Capital of Culture (a title bestowed by the European Union) while also feting 20 years of Slovak independence. Along the **Old Craftsman Row** (Hrnčiarska), visitors can drop in on the ancient ateliers of modern-day artists, blacksmiths, and potters. Locals fill the cobblestoned main square and beyond, spilling out of wine bars like **Villa Cassa**, which pours 800 varietals, including some from the nearby Tokaj region. Košice's location in eastern Slovakia makes it convenient to explore several **national parks**, the **ski resorts** and **glacial lakes** of **High Tatras**, and UNESCO World Heritage sites, including a treasury of centuries-old **wooden churches**. "Košice has always been a city of culture," says guide Milan Kolcun. "Only now we are no longer anonymous." ●

THE VITALS

Košice is 5 hours by train or road from Slovakia's capital Bratislava, and 3.5 hours by road from Budapest in neighbouring Hungary. There are hour-long flights from Bratislava to Košice.



2-in-1 PCs that adapt to you.

Laptop when you need it. Tablet when you want it.

Robust performance
Power is all yours with 4th Gen Intel® Core™ processors and Windows 8.1.

Four-way flexibility
A 360-hinge lets you switch between laptop, tent, tablet or stand modes.

Built-in stylus
Take notes, sketch or edit photos with ease.

Precision touchpad
Scroll, zoom, click and point with impressive accuracy and speed.

2-in-1 PCs are powered by Intel® Core™ i5 processors.

Dell.co.in/buyonline

www.facebook.com/DellIndia

Locate the nearest Dell stores: **SMS Dell <Your Place> to 90088 90088.**

*Subject to T & Cs. For more details, see http://www.dell.co.in/tnc. **Trademarks:** Dell and Inspiron are trademarks of Dell Inc. Intel, the Intel Logo, Intel Inside, Intel Core, and Core Inside are trademarks of Intel Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries. Microsoft and Windows are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. Dell Inc. disclaims any proprietary interest in these trademarks and names.

Copyright: © 2015 Dell Inc. All rights reserved.

intel inside™ CORE™ i5



Postcard from Srinagar

JAMMU AND KASHMIR'S CAPITAL IS HEALING FROM LAST YEAR'S DELUGE—AND IT NEEDS ALL THE HELP IT CAN GET BY NEHA SUMITRAN | PAINTING BY SEEMA GHIYA

It's 7.20 p.m. and the sun is only just fading, bathing everything—the water, houseboats, and distant mountains—in a mellow, saffron-tinted light. The Zabarwan Range, crowned with mist, flickers with every row of our shikara's paddle. Its peaks, like the cotton-ball clouds above us, live in two worlds: the sky and the mirror-like reflections of Dal Lake.

Srinagar is breathtaking, but scarred. The effects of the devastating floods that swept the city in September last year are palpable, especially on the lake. There are lilies but the lotuses are all gone. There are half-submerged houseboats in Meena Bazaar. The number of tourists has fallen by half: Terrible news for the residents, but for travellers seeking to soak in Kashmiri culture minus the hordes, there is never a better time to visit.

The **Old City** on the banks of the Sutlej River is home to the **Shah Hamdan Masjid**, with its papier mâché ceiling panels, and the **Jamia Masjid**, which can seat over 30,000 for prayers. Its markets have stalls selling wild spinach, copper kitchenware, and cockscomb flowers. I lingered over its sights and smells, and to soak in the neighbourhood's brick-and-wood architecture. It is a skyline from a different era.

Looking for an intimate experience of Kashmiri culture, I ate at **Mughal Darbar** and **Ahdoo's**, both serving traditional *wazwan* dishes. My suggestions: the memorable rogan josh at Ahdoo's, and Mughal Darbar's fantastic wazwan thali, which includes kebabs, delicately spiced lamb *yakhni* curry, and best of all, the *tabak maaz,* fatty cuts of lamb, slow-cooked in milk and then fried in pure ghee. Like every other pursuit in Srinagar, a wazwan dinner is best followed by a leisurely boat ride. All you can hear is the flick of the shikara's heart-shaped paddle meeting the moonlit waters of the Dal.

ATLAS



Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir
Houseboats on the Dal have eccentric names, ranging from Mountbatten and Nargis, to Young Pinafore and Flowing Faries.

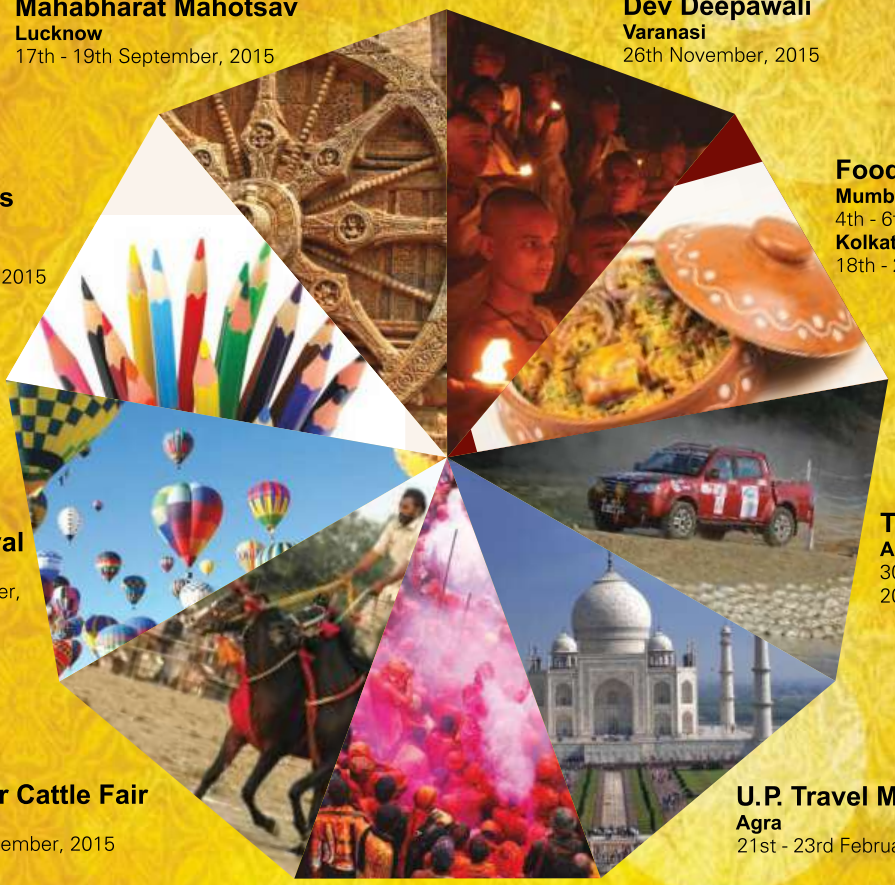
THE HERITAGE ARC

Mahabharat Mahotsav
Lucknow
17th - 19th September, 2015

Dev Deepawali
Varanasi
26th November, 2015

Travel Writers Conclave
Lucknow
5th - 7th October, 2015

Food Festival
Mumbai
4th - 6th December, 2015
Kolkata
18th - 20th December, 2015



International Balloon Festival
Agra
14th - 16th November, 2015

Taj Car Rally
Agra
30th - 31st January, 2016

Bateshwar Cattle Fair
Agra
7th - 14th November, 2015

U.P. Travel Mart
Agra
21st - 23rd February, 2016

Holi Festival
Braj
19th March, 2016

How about a date with
India's most vibrant fairs & festivals?
See you in Uttar Pradesh.

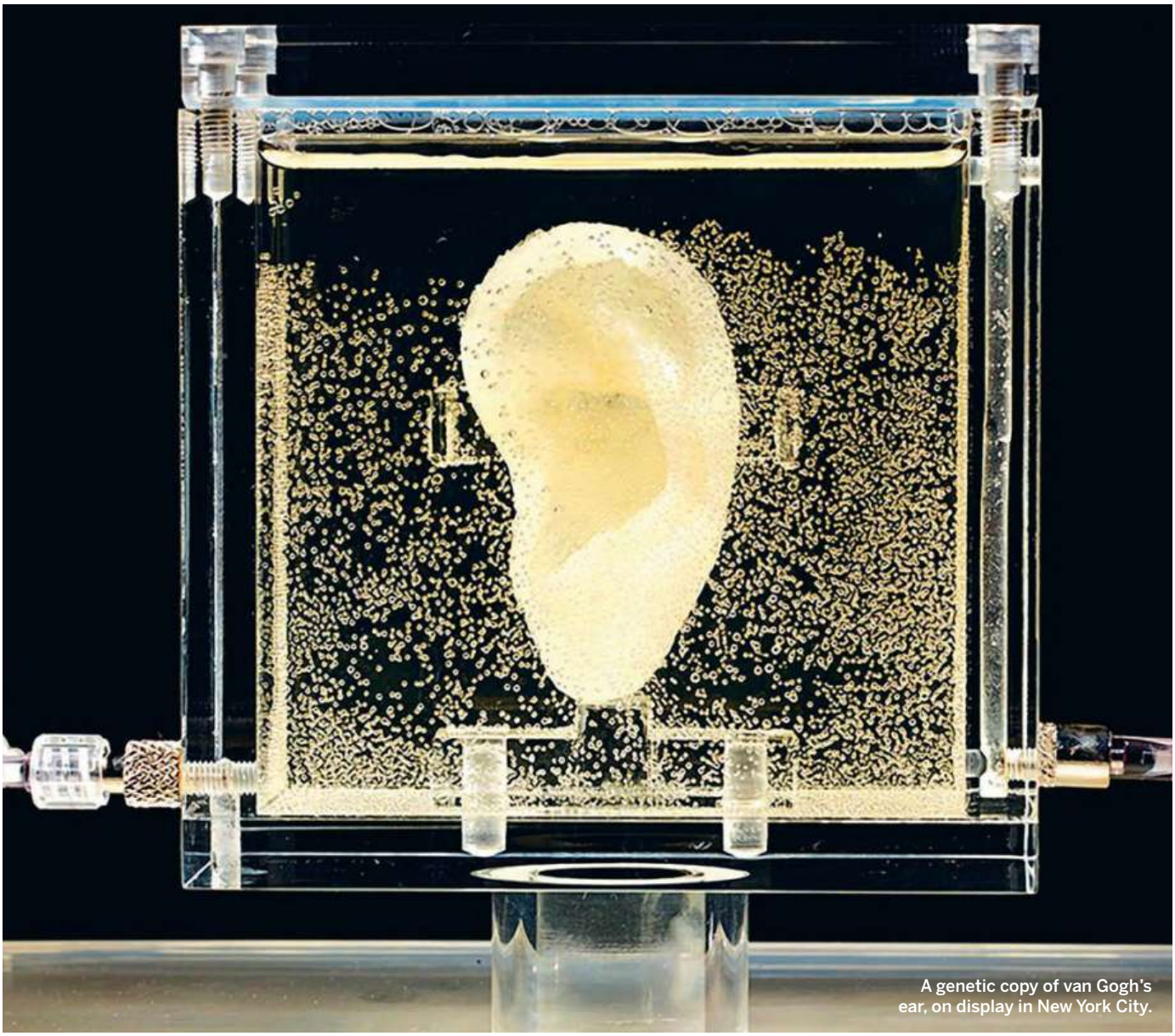
Uttar Pradesh is a state full of happiness and celebrations. There is a festival happening somewhere in the state, all across the year. Be it the adventurous Taj Car Rally of Agra or the colorful Lathmar Holi of Braj, Uttar Pradesh brings you reasons to celebrate life, all the year round.

Uttar Pradesh
HOME OF THE TAJ

DIRECTORATE OF TOURISM, UTTAR PRADESH
C-13, Vipin Khand, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow-226 010. (UP) (India).
EPABX: +91-522-2307037 I Fax: +91-522-2308937
e-mail: upstdc@up-tourism.com I Website: www.uptourism.gov.in

Uttar Pradesh
Amazing Heritage Grand Experiences
UTTAR PRADESH TOURISM

https://twitter.com/uptourismgov
DOWNLOAD APP
https://facebook.com/uttarpradeshtourism



A genetic copy of van Gogh's ear, on display in New York City.

Stop, Look, and Listen

AROUND THE WORLD WITH VINCENT VAN GOGH BY HANNAH SHEINBERG

Want to observe the 125th anniversary of Vincent van Gogh's untimely death? Here are five places to experience the Postimpressionist painter's legacy—minus the absinthe.

EINDHOVEN, NETHERLANDS Look down for a stellar sight along the new "Starry Night"-inspired bike path, made with solar-powered stones.

NEW YORK CITY The Ronald Feldman Gallery hosts a living-tissue replica of van Gogh's ear, created by artist Diemut Strebe with DNA from a descendant of the artist's brother.

ARLES, FRANCE Dine under the famous yellow awning of Café la Nuit—now the Café van Gogh—the outdoor eatery depicted in van Gogh's "Café Terrace at Night."

TILBURG, THE NETHERLANDS Make your own masterpiece at an interactive recreation of van Gogh's high school art classroom.

AUVERS, FRANCE Though he originally hailed from The Netherlands, the cemetery where the artist and his brother Theo are buried side-by-side, is located in Auvers-sur-Oise, a northwestern suburb about 27 kilometres from Paris. ●

DIEMUT STREBE/AP IMAGES

TATA MOTORS

TATA

LEAGUES AHEAD

THE MULTI-DRIVE, MULTI-FEATURE BOLT

GET. SET. BOLT.

BOLT

FROM TATA MOTORS

SMS 'BOLT' to 5616161 | Toll free: 1800 209 7979



SPORT ECO CITY

REVOTRON 1.2
Turbo with MULTI-DRIVE



CONNECTNEXT Touchscreen music system

ABS

9th Gen ABS with EBD & CSC

T&C apply. Standard SMS rates apply. Accessories shown in picture may not be a part of standard equipment. Colours may not match the actual colours due to printing limitations.

FCB ULKA 10425068

Dragon Tales

SYMBOLISING FEROCITY FOR SOME AND BENEVOLENCE FOR OTHERS, FESTIVALS THAT CELEBRATE THE MYTHICAL CREATURE BY RUMELA BASU



DRACHENSTICH, FURTH IM WALD, GERMANY
Records of Germany's oldest folk play, *Drachenstich* or *Spearing the Dragon*, date back to the 1500s. In it, a Bavarian knight slays a vicious dragon during a Bavaria-Bohemia battle. Since 2010, the star of this show has been Tradinno, a 15-metre-tall, fire-breathing dragon robot brought to the town of Furth im Wald every August. The play has now been transformed into a grand production with over 1,000 participants.



KINRYU NO MAI, TOKYO, JAPAN
A 60-foot-long dragon is the prime attraction of the Golden Dragon Dance or *Kinryu no mai* at Tokyo's Senso-ji temple. This puppet-dragon carried by eight men from the temple every 18th March and October (since 1958) celebrates the reconstruction of the 7th-century temple. Legend has it that the resident deity descended from the skies as a serpent-like being to create a forest of a hundred pine trees and bestow prosperity.



WIELKA PARADA SMOKÓW, KRAKÓW, POLAND
Krakow's name comes from the legend of dragon-slayer Krakus, who killed the evil Wawel Dragon. Despite the story, locals still celebrate their dragon with a festival that children particularly enjoy. Over 1,000 children and adults parade the streets with dragon puppets as part of a 3-4 day festival in May-June. Even kids from outside Poland participate and the best dragons as well as the most eco-friendly ones win an award.



PARO TSECHU, PARO, BHUTAN
Druk the thunder dragon is Bhutan's national emblem and a symbol of power and prosperity found everywhere: on shop signboards, hotel names, and flags. In Bhutan's monasteries, monks in flowing garb and masks perform a ritual dance known as *chham* during religious festivals or *tsechus.* The fanged masks represent deities fashioned after the mythical Druk. One of the grandest tsechus is held at Paro Monastery in late March/April.



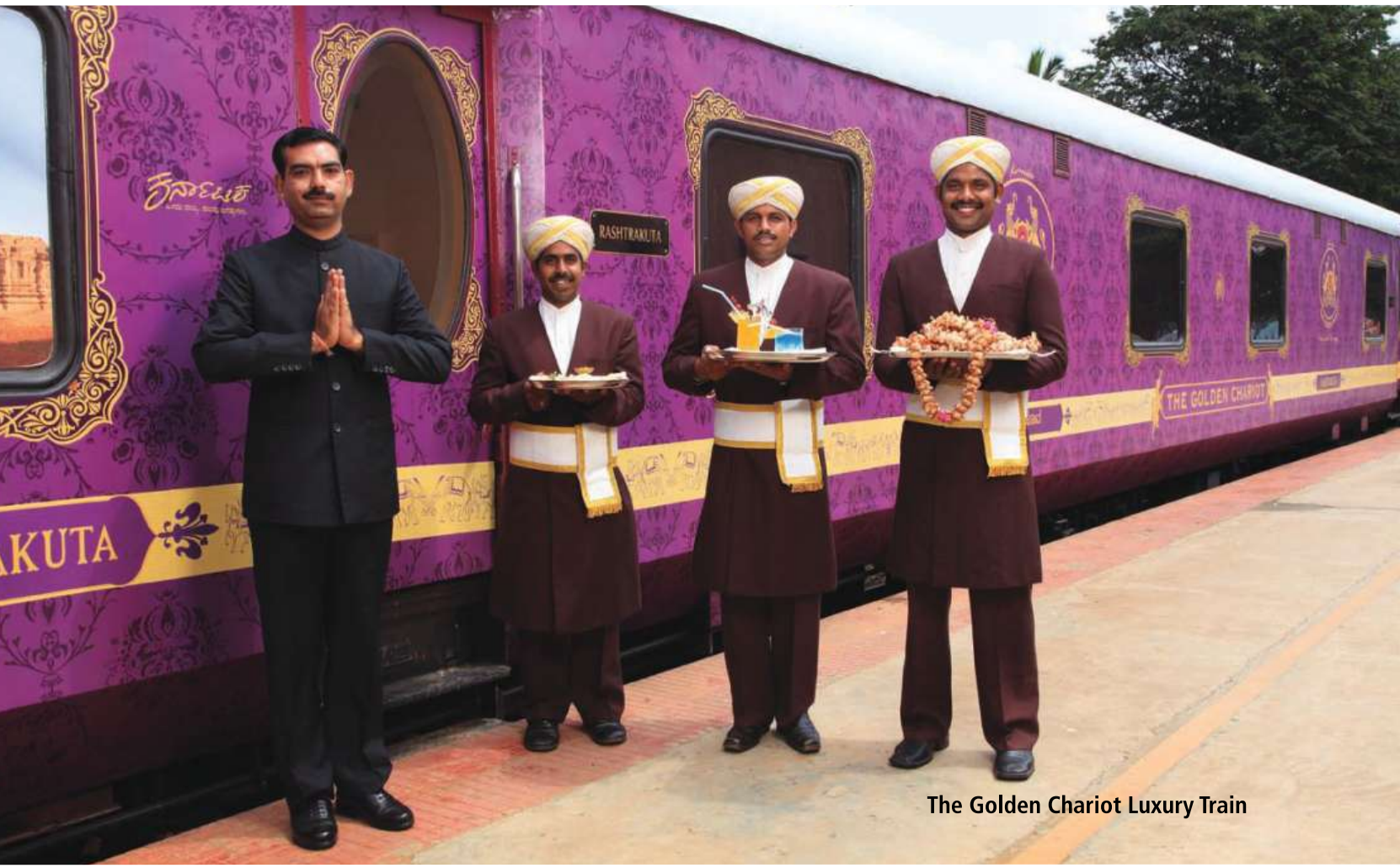
DUANWU FESTIVAL, HONG KONG, CHINA
With a horse-like head, serpent body, and tiger-like paws, the Chinese dragon symbolises power and potency. The mythical creature adorns the boats of the Dragon Boat festival, or Duanwu, held every year in June. Some of the grandest festivities are held in Hong Kong, where boat races are the highlight. Each boat, which holds over 20 rowers, has an intricately carved and painted stern and fore.



ST. DAVID'S DAY, CARDIFF, WALES
The red dragon Y Ddraig Goch has been the quintessential symbol of Wales since its victory over the mythical white dragon in Welsh folklore. The symbol is seen not only on the national flag, but also atop buildings, on souvenirs, emblems, and logos around the country. Every year on 1 March, the Welsh celebrate their national day, or St. David's Day by dressing up as Y Ddraig Goch, or by making puppets for the grand parade in the capital Cardiff.

MICHAEL HEITMANN/DPA/CORBIS WIRE/IMAGELIBRARY (GERMANY), TAWIN MUKDHARAKOSA/SHUTTERSTOCK (JAPAN), DEVISU/SHUTTERSTOCK (POLAND), AWL RM/INDIAPICTURE (BHUTAN), ANDRE M. CHANG/ALAMY/INDIAPICTURE (CHINA), DAVID CROSSLAND/ALAMY/INDIAPICTURE (WALES)

Department of Tourism
Karnataka



The Golden Chariot Luxury Train

You will discover how this glorious chariot is not just a chariot

Karnataka
THE GOLDEN CHARIOT
Many worlds. One voyage.

Karnataka
One State. Many Worlds.

www.goldenchariot.org

www.karnatakatourism.org

Eat Like a Local

MULTICULTURALISM IS SERVED ON A PLATE IN MELBOURNE, WHERE THE BEST LOCAL RESTAURANTS ARE OFTEN CHINESE, GREEK, OR COFFEE SHOPS BY KALYANI PRASHER

Coffee isn't food, but don't say that to any Melburnian. The city takes its beans very seriously. Debates over which place serves the best coffee are regarded with as much importance as conversations about world peace. What's a traveller to do? I decided to dive right in with tips from friends and recommendations from others I met at cafés. I went on a coffee-themed city walk, and even got in touch with the local tourism office to ask for their suggestions. And I stopped for a cuppa at every coffee shop that caught my attention on my rambles across the buzzing city.

FOR GREAT VIEWS

I noticed **Hortus** only because of a black-and-white cow installation poking out of a tree outside the coffee shop. The art café in Docklands is inside a thriving greenhouse, which has over 50 varieties of edible plants. It has negligible signage but is known for serving Seven Seeds, a locally revered brand of coffee. I spent some lovely afternoons in the al fresco section, gazing out at the bay, munching on organic pumpkin-rocket sandwiches, and sipping coffee under sunny, blue skies. Their cold coffee is pretty good too *(sevenseeds.com.au/pages/locate)*.



Clement Coffee in Melbourne is a small, cheerful café known for its top-notch cappuccinos and bakes.

WHERE THE COOL KIDS HANG

South Melbourne Market is hipster central and **Clement Coffee** is no less so. Queue up for coffees brewed by boys in beards and leather aprons. Order a Long Black (Australia's version of the Americano) or the Flat White, a latte made from their single-origin coffee, and enjoy people-watching in the market area. On Sundays, Clement also stocks doughnuts made by celebrity chef Matt Forbes, which are the most delicious salted caramel doughnuts in Melbourne *(www.clementcoffee.com; Matt Forbes doughnuts available at his store* **Cobb Lane** *Tues-Sun; www.cobblane.com.au)*.

FOR SERIOUS AMATEURS

A short walk from Clement, **St.ALi** is an edgy café full of stylish people working on their laptops, sustained by Ali's brown gold. The menu features coffees that trace their origins to Colombia, Mexico, Brazil, and a single-origin Kenyan coffee that promises "elegant floral notes, blueberries, pineapple, juicy lime with hints of honey."

St.ALi has Latte Art masterclasses every Thursday *(from AU$100/₹4,600)*. Order piccolos (small lattes) so you can try both their Brazilian and Colombian coffees *(www.stali.com.au)*.

FOR THE BUZZ

Round off a trip to the busy South Melbourne Market (with some of the city's finest produce) with Daddy's Girl, a strong hit of espresso and one of **Padre Café's** most popular orders. They also sell beautiful coffee-making accessories but the outlet is very small and customers often finish their coffee standing outside. The few tables they do have are outside the café: great if you want to be in the thick of the market buzz, but not so good when you're looking for some quiet after shopping *(padrecoffee.com.au)*.

A LITTLE SECRET

A hole-in-the-wall café in Docklands, **Caffe Bambino** is run by friendly Italians and serves coffee along with delicious paninis and cakes. It's in one corner of a small residential park on Bourke Street, behind Woolworths supermarket. I had their Long Black with a dash of milk every single day of my week in the area.

A cup of coffee in Melbourne costs between AU$3-4/₹150-200. Cold coffees and shakes are generally between AU$6-8/₹180-370. Each of these cafés also sells roasted coffee beans, so you can take a stash of your favourite blend back home.

PHOTO COURTESY: CLEMENT COFFEE

COX & KINGS

coxandkings.com

CHIMELONG 长隆

Marine-Themed Hengqin Bay Hotel

offering you unlimited entries to OCEAN KINGDOM

1 hour by ferry from Hong Kong International Airport

CHINA • ZHUHAI
CHIMELONG INTERNATIONAL OCEAN RESORT

Chimelong International Ocean Resort is located in Hengqin, Zhuhai, China. The Chimelong Ocean Kingdom features one of the world's largest aquariums, allowing guests to view the rare whale shark, beluga whales, polar bears, and other adorable animals up close! Winner of the 2014 The Award for Outstanding Achievement (Theme Park) in the world. The Circus Show with more than 150 performers from worldwide is on the stage every night.

Cox & Kings is proud to present Chimelong to the ever-discerning Indian traveller, eager to immerse themselves in such unique, new experiences anywhere in the world.

EXPERIENCE WORLD CLASS ENTERTAINMENT AT CHIMELONG WITH COX & KINGS



ESCORTED GROUP TOUR

Flavours of Hong Kong with Chimelong 5 N

Hong Kong, Macau & Chimelong

₹ 1,08,976* (with airfare)

TAILOR-MADE HOLIDAY

Best of Hong Kong & Macau with Chimelong 5 N

Hong Kong, Macau & Chimelong

₹ 98,000* (with airfare)

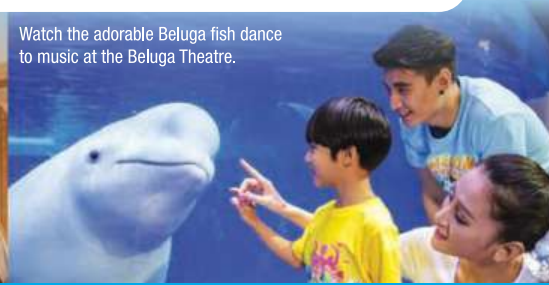




Enjoy scrumptious meals specially prepared by our India Chef - Bijandra Lal at the Indian restaurant.



Family Room



Watch the adorable Beluga fish dance to music at the Beluga Theatre.

长隆海洋王国 HengQin Chimelong Ocean Kingdom

长隆横琴国际马戏城 CHIMELONG HENGQIN INTERNATIONAL CIRCUS CITY

长隆横琴湾酒店 CHIMELONG HENGQIN BAY HOTEL

马戏酒店 长隆 Chimelong Circus Hotel

长隆企鹅酒店 CHIMELONG PENGUIN HOTEL

Scan this QR code to connect with the Travel Expert

CALL : 1800 22 1235, 1800 209 0400, 98675 65599

SMS : CHIME to 5757513

WEB : www.coxandkings.com

COX & KINGS DUNIYA DEKHO ESCORTED GROUP TOURS

COX & KINGS FLEXIHOL TAILOR-MADE HOLIDAYS

Escorted Group Tours: All prices are Ex- Mumbai after discount, unless specified based on per person on twin sharing basis. Tour price includes Economy class Return Airfare, Taxes, Visas, Hotel Accommodation, Sightseeing, Tips, Services of Cox & Kings Tour Manager/ local guide, Overseas Travel Insurance policy and meals as per the itinerary. Optional, High season surcharges (if applicable) per adult/child to be paid extra. Please refer to the itinerary and price grid for complete details. For terms & conditions please refer to our Duniya Dekho terms & conditions booklet. Holiday Price will be calculated on Rate of Exchange prevailing on the day of the booking. Subject to RBI/GOI approval. GST of 3.50% and all other applicable taxes to be paid extra on the total billing amount. **Individual Tours:** Above mentioned rate is per person on twin sharing basis. Holiday Price Includes: Ex- Mumbai Economy Class Air ticket, Airport taxes, Over-seas Mediclaim Insurance, Accommodation at hotels with breakfast, Sightseeing on Seat In Coach basis. Holiday Price Excludes: Govt. Service Tax of 3.50%, and any expense of personal nature. Holiday price will be calculated on Rate of Exchange prevailing on the day of the booking. Above rates are starting from rates. *Conditions apply.

Melbourne's cosmopolitan mix of people is reflected in its food scene, which ranges from tiny dim sum restaurants and edgy food trucks to old-school restaurants and swanky new kitchens. Mains at mid-range restaurants cost about AU$12-AU$13/ ₹560-600; a side is around AU$ 4-6/₹180-280. Food is not cheap in Melbourne but the portions are most often generous, so sharing is always a possibility.

FOR ITALIAN

Lygon Street in the Italian neighbourhood of Carlton is the place to go if you're craving a hearty pasta or pizza meal. **Brunetti's** is a local institution that first served Italian coffee in Melbourne (give up on avoiding the coffee) and now has cafés around town. It has counters serving pizza, pasta, salads, pastries, and coffee. Locals drop by for a quick bite or to parcel goodies when they're visiting friends for dinner, but the sheer variety on offer makes Brunetti's a great place to go if you're with a large family. I love their cream-filled buns, but they do a fine fusilli salad and light, delicious pizzas—not something you'd expect from a café chain *(brunetti.com.au)*.

FOR GREEK

The other major cuisine of Melbourne is Greek. Get your fill at the café-style **Stalactites** on Lonsdale Street, which is full of fabulous Greek restaurants. Stalactites is packed with locals tucking into souvlaki rolls, platters piled with pita and hummus, and feta marinated in a dozen different ways *(www.stalactites.com.au)*.

FOR CHINESE

Melbourne loves Asian cuisine. Some even say it has the best range of Asian fare outside of Singapore. Testament to this fact is the cumin pork at **Sichuan House** on Corrs Lane: a plate of cumin-spiced crisp fried pork with red chillies. The no-frills restaurant is located in a little by-lane off China Town.







Melbourne's food scene is vibrant and varied. Lygon Street in the Italian neighbourhood of Carlton has restaurants and stores that sell handmade pasta (top right), **sausage and a variety of Italian ingredients; For a Greek meal, the al-fresco cafés at Lonsdale Street** (bottom) **are a good bet, and for a dinner of dumplings, ShanDong MaMa's dim sum** (top left) **never fails.**



FOOD TRUCK FRENZY

Melbourne's food trucks once served only cheap, snacky foods that could be wolfed down in a few minutes. That's changed dramatically and the city's mobile kitchens now serve African cuisine, jaffles (Australian toasties), wood-fired pizzas, Brazilian grills, and of course, single-estate cappuccinos crowned with feather-light foam. *(Find a food truck through wherethetruck.at/trucks/)*.

FOR DUMPLINGS

Over the years I have tried many dim sum places but my favourite by far is **ShanDong MaMa**, in a slightly shady mall on Bourke Street. I recommend their parcels of prawn, calamari, and salmon, but pretty much everything on their menu is good.

FOR THAI

PokPok, named after the sound of a pestle pounding spices in a mortar, serves Thai street food like Chiang Mai grilled sausage, pineapple fried rice, and for dessert, crisp roti with bananas and nutella. Their pork with green pepper corns is a must-try *(pokpok.com.au)*.

FOR VIETNAMESE

At **Banoi**, get the set lunch: half a banh mi sandwich and a cup of fragrant pho. The restaurant's tagline, "traditionally Vietnamese, authentically Melbourne" is exemplified by their vermicelli bowls, rice paper rolls, and savoury pancakes. Round off your meal with Vietnamese coffee, served with condensed milk *(banoi.com.au)*.

PHOTO COURTESY: SHAN DONG MAMA (DIM SUM), MICHAEL COYNE/LONELY PLANET IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES (PASTA), DAWN DELANEY/LONELY PLANET IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES (OUTDOOR RESTAURANT), KERIN FORSTMANIS/STOCKIMO/ALAMY/INDIAPICTURE (FOOD TRUCK)

Incredible India

enchanting tamil nadu
experience yourself

Do trekking along the lush green Tea Estates at the Nilgiris.





The smell of the green leaves will leave you wanting for a hot cup of freshly brewed tea.

Come, Experience Ooty.

Tamil Nadu Tourism

Commissionerate of Tourism, Tamil Nadu Tourism Complex, No.2, Wallajah Road, Chennai - 600 002. INDIA Call : 91-44-2538 3333 / 9857 / 4444, Fax : 91-44-2536 1385

Toll Free - 1800 4253 1111 E-mail: ttdc@vsnl.com Visit : www.tamilnadutourism.org. For online booking log on : www.ttdconline.com

Agra : Ph: 0562 - 242 1183 Ahmedabad : Ph: 079 - 2658 0317 Bengaluru : 080 - 2228 6181 Bhubaneswar : Ph: 0674 - 2597 228 Goa : Ph: 0832 - 222 6390

Hyderabad : Ph: 040 - 2766 7492 Jaipur : Ph: 0141 - 2204 999 Kolkata : Ph: 033 - 24237432 Mumbai : Ph: 022 2411 0118 New Delhi : Ph: 011 - 2374 5427, 2336 6327 Thiruvananthapuram Ph: 0471 2327 310

DIPR/641/DIS/2015

FOR A GLASS OF FINE WINE

Melbourne has a number of vineyard restaurants, within a couple of hours from the city, that are perfect for a fancy meal. **Rae's Restaurant** has fabulous views of the Yarra Valley, and serves wine from the Balgownie Estate where it is located. Order beer-battered snapper or whiting or the vine-smoked chargrilled boneless rib-eye, and soak in the views through the ceiling-to-floor glass. Their freshly baked bread is top-notch *(52 km/1 hr; www.balgowniees-tate.com.au)*. **Polperro** is a winery and an intimate bistro with an in-house brand of wine called Even Keel. I enjoyed sharing the duck cassoulet which came with a delightful crumb crust. Regardless of what you're eating, try their smoked yogurt *(90 km/1.5 hr; www.polperrowines.com.au)*. About an hour's drive from Melbourne, sits the stately Chateau Yering. **Eleonore's Restaurant** is the hotel's formal dining room. This award-winning restaurant is open only for dinner and has two- and three-course set meals as well as an à la carte menu. Pair a glass of Yarra Valley Chardonnay with the wild mushroom tortellini or miso-braised eggplant, followed up with their lush hazelnut cheesecake and a sweet wine for dessert. Dinner at Eleonore's is an indulgence, and a great excuse for staying a night at the chateau *(50 km/1 hr; www.chateauyering.com.au)*.











Yarra Valley's vineyards (top) **paint a pretty picture, especially at sunset. The grape-growing region, about an hour by road from Melbourne, has a number of vineyard restaurants like Polperro, which serve many-course meals paired with wines made in-house** (middle left)**; The food at Grossi never fails to please** (middle right)**; George Calombaris has become a household name across the world with the success of the TV series *MasterChef Australia*. The Press Club is his flagship restaurant, one of seven he owns in Melbourne** (bottom right and left).

MASTERCHEF WARS

Two of Melbourne's fanciest restaurants—**The Press Club** by George Calombaris and **Grossi Florentino Grill** by Guy Grossi—couldn't be farther apart where culinary philosophies are concerned. Greek vs Italian. New age vs old school. Edgy vs wholesome. They are each spectacular in their own way. The Greek-influenced Press Club has great textures: The butter is like foam, the pork melts in the mouth, each dish looks like a work of art. But Grossi manages to pull off a rare thing: A fine-dining restaurant that offers comfort food and doesn't leave the customer feeling short-changed. Florentino serves generous portions of hearty fare like lamb stew and tiramisu. At The Press Club, I was left wondering if I should've asked for seconds of that delicious pork, as the portion size was smaller than the Aussie dollar coin. I found more comfort in the food that Florentino serves though I did enjoy the experimental flavour combinations at The Press Club *(www.grossiflorentino.com; www.thepressclub.com.au)*. ●

PHOTO COURTESY: **PRESS CLUB** (BOTTOM ROW, CHEF AND DISH), PHOTO COURTESY: **VICTORIS TOURISM** (MIDDLE ROW, PINK SALMON), PHOTO COURTESY: **POLPERRO** (WINE), **IPPEI NAO/GETTY IMAGES** (YARRA VALLEY VINEYARD)



Popularly called the Borgloon Church, this ethereal structure in the Belgian countryside is actually an art installation created in 2011, one of many in the area.

Between the Lines

A SURREAL CHURCH DISAPPEARS INTO THE SURROUNDING LANDSCAPE BY RUMELA BASU

Even though it's made of 30 tonnes of steel, Borgloon Church looks like a surrealist painting. From certain angles, sections of the structure appear transparent, as if it has dissolved into its surroundings. It stands in the countryside outside Borgloon town, in Belgium, 70 kilometres east of the capital Brussels.

A spire and cross crown the building, but this isn't a traditional place of worship. It's an art project made from 2,000 evenly spaced, stacked horizontal steel plates. The installation is called "Reading Between the Lines" and was built in 2011, by famous Belgian architect duo Pieterjan Gijs and Arnout Van Vaerenbergh. Popularly referred to as the "transparent church of Belgium," it is fashioned after the medieval churches of the region. As the position of the sun changes through the day, the facade of the church keeps changing, and can go from solid to transparent, depending on where the viewer is standing. The landscape around can be seen through gaps between the lines, creating the illusion of a pixellated image. This piece of art is placed in a field outside Borgloon and is accessible only on foot or bicycle. Visitors can see the green surroundings through the slats up-close but the installation is best viewed from afar.

The structure, which is 10 metres high, is part of a project that aims to bring art into public places. Its empty interior is said to be an architectural metaphor for the state of churches in the region, where attendance has dwindled to nothing. ●

THE VITALS

Borgloon is a small city 70 km/1 hr by road east of Brussels. The closest train station is Alken, which is 1 hr from Brussels and a 10 km/15-min drive from Borgloon. Alken is connected to Borgloon by bus and taxi.

"Read Between the Lines" is a little outside the city. A walking trail from Sint-Truidersteenweg (near the crossing with Grootloonstraat) leads to the structure. The Borgloon tourism office *(www.borgloon.be; +32-12-673663)* provides detailed information about the structure as well as free hiking and cycling maps outlining other unusual art projects in the region, such as Dré Wapenaar's tear-shaped tents that hang from trees near the castle of Hex.

SYLVIA ADAMS/SHUTTERSTOCK

Coffees of India

Rich in Taste.. Excellent Flavour...

**Like the best wines or choicest cuisine,
fine coffee is synonymous with refined taste.**

- We all drink coffee for pleasure.
 An inspirational drink that has become aspirational and lifestyle beverage...
- You know that coffee can keep you alert and therefore helps you perform better and reduce the stress.



कॉफी बोर्ड
COFFEE BOARD

www.indiacoffee.org

*Coffee in a measure,
is a treasure*



AD advertising

Download to Travel Better

FIVE APPS TO MAKE YOUR NEXT TRIP MORE FULFILLING



INSIDE STORY

Spotted by Locals

Explore 62 places in Europe and North America through a curated list of blogs, mobile city guides, and PDF maps created by locals who know their cities intimately. Discover a secret gig in Berlin, the best bar for craft beers in Vancouver, and a 180-year-old art supplies store in Rome. The app offers tips and detailed offline maps and all information is regularly updated.
For iOS and Android devices ($3.99/₹253).



HITTING THE SWEET SPOT

Paris Pastry Guide

Your manual to the city's bakeries, and pastry shops, hand-picked by Paris-based author and pastry chef David Lebovitz and organised by arrondissement and type of sweet. The photos are luscious and the descriptions offer guidance on what to order, in case you're not sure what millefeuille means.
For iOS ($3.99/₹253) and Kindle ($3.77/₹239) devices.



FOR A LONG SHELF LIFE

Pocket

The Pocket app lets users download articles, travel guides, images, and short videos to view at leisure, offline. Links can be saved from browsers and over 1,500 apps like Twitter and Flipboard. It can be viewed across devices and accessed from your phone, tablet, and computer.
For Kindle Fire, iOS, and Android devices; free.



WHEN TO SCORE 40 WINKS

JetLag Genie

Beat jetlag blues with a timetable customised to your flight timings, sleep patterns and destination. The app kicks in a few days before the trip begins and tells users when to sleep, nap, and wake up to minimise the effects of travelling across time zones. It also has a guide for taking melatonin pills (used to regulate sleep cycles) while travelling.
For iOS devices (£1.99/₹197).



TRAVEL POST-ITS

Findery

Read notes about places around the world, left behind by fellow travellers. Findery has a long list of crowdsourced sightseeing tips in locations ranging from Mexico and Dubai to Nicaragua and New York. Learn about where in the Big Apple the Beat poet Allen Ginsberg lived, the story behind the mosaic-dotted poles in the East Village neighbourhood, and the secret history of an East Tenth Street bench.
For iOS and Android devices; free.

LUIGI VACCARELLA/GRAND TOUR/LATITUDE/CORBIS/IMAGELIBRARY (COUPLE), NEIRFY/SHUTTERSTOCK (EIFFEL TOWER), ASCENT XMEDIA/TAXI/GETTY IMAGES (MAN READING TAB), RUBBERBALL/ALAMY/INDIAPICTURE (PLANE PASSENGER), JUAN CARLOS MUÑOZ/AGE FOTOSTOCK/DINODIA (SHOP)



MINISTRY OF TOURISM & CULTURE

PROUDLY PRESENTS

Citrawarna

@KUALA LUMPUR

EXPERIENCE THE **COLOURS OF MALAYSIA** IN A LIVE PERFORMANCE OF STUNNING SPECIAL EFFECTS, VIVID VISUALS AND COLOURFUL ILLUMINATIONS LIKE NEVER BEFORE!

* * *

17TH OCT 2015

DATARAN MERDEKA ▪ FREE ADMISSION!

WWW.TOURISMMALAYSIA.GOV.MY FRIENDOFMALAYSIA

* * *

TOURISM MALAYSIA

MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND CULTURE MALAYSIA

KUALA LUMPUR CITY HALL

Contact your nearest travel agent or the following Tourism Malaysia offices: **MUMBAI**: Tel: +91 22 6635 2085 • Email: mtpb.mumbai@tourism.gov.my
NEW DELHI: Tel: +91 11 4601 1674/5 • Email: mtpb.newdelhi@tourism.gov.my | **CHENNAI:** Tel: +91 44 4506 8080 • Email: mtpb.chennai@tourism.gov.my

Follow us on: www.facebook.com/malaysiajao | facebook.com/friendofmalaysia www.twitter.com/malaysiajao www.trulyasia.tv

In Fine Print

A NEW BOOK OF COLONIAL AQUATINTS AND PAINTINGS OFFERS GLIMPSES OF INDIA'S 18TH CENTURY LANDSCAPES



The waterfall in the town of Papanasam (formerly Puppanassum) in Tinnevelly (Tirunelveli) district in present-day Tamil Nadu.

Daniells' India: Views From the Eighteenth Century is a charming sketch of India's sights and landscapes as seen by British painters Thomas and William Daniell. Between its pages are 96 paintings and aquatints—an etching technique that yields watercolour-like prints— that the duo created on their travels across Calcutta, Delhi, Agra and the south of the country. In this extract, art historian B.N. Goswamy introduces the artists and their journey through India.

Thomas and William Daniell, uncle and nephew, who, coming from England, roamed our land at the very end of the eighteenth century and took in her 'sights without number', clearly had the 'wherewithal with which to see'. And what they saw they recorded in their distinctive but brilliant manner. Their work, most of which they turned into aquatints—issued in six series of two sets, each consisting of twelve views—became a classic in its own days and has remained so for close to two centuries. Oriental Scenery is how they named their serialised work, and in it, as a contemporary admirer of theirs put it once, 'The East is clearly reflected as the moon in a lake.'



Daniells' India: Views From the Eighteenth Century (Niyogi Books, 2015, ₹6,000)

A great deal has been written about the Daniells and one knows many facts which they recorded about themselves and their long sojourn in India: from 1786 to 1794. To recapitulate briefly, however. Thomas Daniell, born in 1749, was the son of an innkeeper and began by painting coaches, but turned to serious painting for he was 'animated

PHOTO COURTESY: NIYOGI BOOKS



HONEYMOON OFFER

Book 3 nights and stay the 4th night absolutely FREE! OR Book 3 rooms and get the 4th room absolutely FREE! OR Book 30 days in advance and get a 20% DISCOUNT!

Rates start from Rs.11,500/-* per night inclusive of stay and buffet breakfast for two.
Offer valid till September 30th, 2015. * Taxes extra as applicable.

Kumarakom Lake Resort
A luxury experience from
The Paul Resorts and Hotels

Kumarakom North P.O., Kottayam 686 563, Kerala, India.
Tel: 0091 481 2524900, 2524501. TOLL FREE INDIA 1 800 425 5030 www.kumarakomlakeresort.in



The *choultry* (top)—a resting place for pilgrims—at the residence of king Tremal Naig in Madurai, Tamil Nadu; The mausoleum of Sultan Parvez (bottom), son of emperor Jehangir, near Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh.

with a love of the romantic and the beautiful', alike in nature and architecture. Early on, he painted several local topographical scenes but these left no great mark on his times till of course he thought of leaving the shores of his homeland and going abroad in search of the picturesque. India—exotic land of opportunity—was in the air at that time, for the British had not only made an entry into the land but by this time—the year was 1783—had established dominance or influence over vast areas of the country. The East India Company controlled the affairs of India then and the permission of the Directors was needed to travel to 'that land'. Thomas applied and received permission to proceed to India as 'an engraver', accompanied by his nephew, William, then only fifteen years of age, who was under

Oriental Scenery is how they named their serialised work, and in it, 'The East is clearly reflected as the moon in a lake'



his tutelage. Uncle and nephew set sail for India via China: the vessel was called Atlas. Early in 1786 they landed at Calcutta. They might not have planned it like this, but as it turned out the twosome stayed for close to eight years, traversing the land and painting, from the eastern parts to the plains of Delhi and Agra and back, and then to the south of India. ●

PHOTO COURTESY: NIYOGI BOOKS



I ♥ Buenos Aires

ARGENTINA'S DEBONAIR CAPITAL HUMS ROUND THE CLOCK, FROM MORNING COFFEE TO LATE NIGHT TANGO BY VICKY BAKER | ILLUSTRATION BY ANNA SIMMONS

Visitors to Buenos Aires invariably fall in love with it and want to stay forever, but locals would rather be in Spain, Italy, or anywhere else. At least so say the lyrics of the song "Puerto Madero," written in Spanglish by half-Argentine, half-American musician Kevin Johansen, about one of the city's shiniest neighbourhoods.

Porteños, as the residents of Buenos Aires call themselves, are notoriously complex and contradictory characters, fiercely patriotic yet puzzled by how much their sprawling hometown

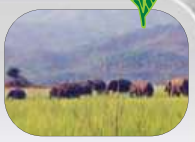
India Tea



KANGRA
Kangra, the 'valley of the gods', yields a distinctive golden brew, with a unique sweet undertone. The tea is grown on the gentle slopes of the outer Himalayas.



DARJEELING
Grown in the shadow of the mighty Himalayas, no tea other than Darjeeling Tea can claim a delicate muscatel flavour, fine aroma and exquisite bouquet.



DOOARS
Nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas, Dooars Tea has the robust character of Assam Tea and is perfect for a strong cup of milk tea.



ASSAM
Amidst rolling verdant hills and picturesque valleys lies the birthplace of Assam Tea with its strong, bright and full-bodied liquor.

PAKISTAN

CHINA

HIMALAYAN RANGE

Thar Desert



Taj Mahal



Khajuraho

Rann of Kutch



Victoria Memorial



NILGIRI
Nilgiri Tea offers an unmatched fine fragrance and brisk liquor, best suited for iced tea. It is grown across the spectacular blue mountain ranges.

BAY OF BENGAL



MUNNAR
One of the most beautiful tea producing regions in the world, Munnar Tea is strong bodied with a lively briskness–distinguishing it from all others.

ARABIAN SEA



Vivekananda Rock Memorial

INDIAN OCEAN

All roads lead to Tea Paradise

© Copyright tea Board of India 2014

Darjeeling is a registered Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) while Assam Orthodox tea, Nilgiri Orthodox tea and Kangra tea are registered Geographical Indications (GI).
This map is not a geographical map, only an indicative one.

TEA BOARD OF INDIA
www.teaboard.gov.in

enchants visitors. They know their country is famous for soccer and steak and tango dancing, but they can't understand why we get giddy about what they consider everyday things: our first sighting of poncho-clad gauchos, or *cortado* coffee, served in chunky glassware.

It is surprisingly easy to slip into daily life in Buenos Aires because the city doesn't revolve around its attractions. Tick off the obvious—the pink-walled **Casa Rosada** (allegedly painted with cow's blood), where the president of Argentina resides; renowned **Recoleta Cemetery**, with its trove of elaborate tombs—and let the rest of the city reveal itself as you explore it at your leisure.

Rise late (most shops don't open until 10 a.m. and museums rarely stir before midday) and skip any hotel breakfast for a coffee and some *medialunas*—Argentine croissants—at a sidewalk café. Then set out for a stroll through the city's highly contrasting neighbourhoods. Grand avenues and ornate town houses from the early 1900s mark classy **Recoleta**. The hippest part of town, stylish **Palermo Viejo**, centres around a low-rise quarter of cobbled streets. Then there is bohemian-feeling **San Telmo**, one of the birthplaces of tango and Buenos Aires's oldest residential quarter.

FOOD REVOLUTION

Buenos Aires's food scene is essentially divided into two camps. In one you'll find time-warp cafés and no-frills *parrillas* (steakhouses), most of which serve up the same dishes: steak of varying cuts, potato fries, slightly overcooked pasta, juicy empanadas, and simple salads. To enjoy a classic parrilla experience, head to the neighbourhood of Palermo, and **Don Julio**, its shelves, walls, and counters decorated with bottles of wine. Another fine option: white-tablecloth **Cantina Don Carlos**, in La Boca next to the Bombonera stadium (take a taxi if travelling at night). Arrive hungry—servings are *abundante*. Vegetarian? You still should stop in a parrilla, if only for the atmosphere. Then head to **Buenos Aires Verde**, a specialist in organic, raw, meat-free cuisine.

The second, more modernist camp celebrates the city's cutting-edge food scene, headed by chefs who earned their stripes in leading European restaurants. Dante Liporace, of the acclaimed **Tarquino**, uses tricks he learned at Catalonia's pioneering El Bulli to create dishes such as a deconstructed provolone pizza. **Hernán Gipponi Restaurante**, headed by the eponymous chef, welcomes adventurous palates to its "one table" communal dinners for tasting menus that may include slow-cooked egg with creamed corn. If you've never tried Japanese/Peruvian fusion



HEMIS/ALAMY

Dancers take turns at tango in the club La Catedral.



BALDOTA
WE ARE LIFE

There is a bit of us in every revolution

Energy has driven many a revolution. It powered machines to go beyond the limits of human strength, drove cars to replace animal-drawn carts, made telephones work to bring people closer, and ran IT networks to change how people live, work and play.

Another revolution is now underway to change the way energy is produced - a transition from fossil fuel to renewable sources.

At Baldota Group, we tap wind energy to generate power. With every spin of the turbine blade we not only transform wind into energy,

we also revolutionize the life of millions.

www.baldota.co.in





Paintings cover walls at Buenos Aires's Museum of Latin American Art (left); **Sushi arranged with Latin flair fills plates at Osaka** (right).

food, **Osaka** is a must, especially for fish lovers.

Casual dining restaurants, including many parrillas, don't take reservations, but they are recommended for upmarket places from 9 p.m. on.

AFTER MIDNIGHT

Buenos Aires lives to party. Nights here can be long and raucous, but Porteños know how to pace themselves, which is why top venues still jump at dawn. These nocturnal habits aren't only for clubbers. When the clock strikes midnight, you'll spot older diners mulling dessert options and young children running around full of pep. As for discos, they only wind down in the predawn hours.

To keep up, visitors may need to sneak in a nap. Bars often don't get revving until midnight, and nightclubs typically fill only after 2 a.m. A good starting point is a show by drumming troupe La Bomba de Tiempo, hosted on Mondays at the cavernous **Ciudad Cultural Konex**, an "alternative" performance space. For tango music, it is **El Boliche de Roberto**, known for its tango crooners. Dancers, especially beginners, should check out **La Catedral**, which offers informal tango lessons.

When you're warmed up, taxi over to **Palermo**; most of the city's nightlife is concentrated in the area. Kick things off with a Cynar julep at **Rey de Copas**, an eclectically stylish lounge bar, then see where the night takes you. Ten years ago, a handful of bars dominated the scene. Now new cocktail joints seem to open every week, some with deliberately hidden entrances: Access to **Floreria Atlantico** first funnels you through a florist-cum-record shop.

TO MARKET, TO MARKET

Fashion and the arts have long been valued in Argentina's capital. Local

TOP 5 LOCAL TIPS

1

Walk the streets of the **Villa Crespo** district, with its 19th-century buildings, for a glimpse into Palermo's past.

2

Buy a **Guia T bus guide** from a newspaper kiosk, and ask a local how to use it.

3

Bus Number 152 takes in key sites, including the Casa Rosada and colourful La Boca quarter.

4

Use **American dollars** for better deals, but don't carry large sums on the street.

5

Check out the 180° view of Buenos Aires from the Sky Bar at the **Hotel Pulitzer**; it's open to non-guests.

MARTIN ZABALA/CORBIS (ARTWORKS), YADID LEVY/ANZENBERGER/REDUX (FOOD)





Eva Perón (left), **wife of one-time Argentine ruler Juan Perón, adorns a brooch; White-walled Recoleta Cemetery** (right) **rises behind a musician.**

designers earned the city even more global acclaim with the launch in 2001 of BAFWeek, or Buenos Aires Fashion Week. The largest concentration of boutiques resides in **Palermo**. Two subdivisions here, nicknamed **Soho** and **Hollywood**, have grown into labyrinths of stores interspersed with bars, cafés, clubs, and *heladerías* (ice cream parlours).

Downtown lures shoppers with brash, pricey **Calle Florida**, a pedestrianised avenue lined with exclusive shops, but much more fun are the city's markets, or ferias, full of vendors selling interesting artefacts and quirky souvenirs. The most famous may be the **Feria de San Telmo**, held on Sundays, which attracts more than 250 vendors dealing in antiques and other wares. Also held on weekends are markets on **Plaza Francia**, in Recoleta, and **Plaza Serrano**, in Palermo; at both you can find artworks, photos (many of La Boca's brightly painted metal houses), hand-stitched leather bags, and signs written in *fileteado*, the traditional flowery writing associated with tango.

Just to the west of Palermo lies a treasure-filled indoor furniture market, **Mercado de las Pulgas**, for those who love the rustic/chic trend. It's about leather along **Murillo Street**, in the Villa Crespo district. Keen on a pair of tango shoes? Try **Comme Il Faut**, on Arenales Street, or browse the calles of Abasto, south of downtown. (While you're there, visit the **Carlos Gardel Museum**, dedicated to the dapper tango legend who died young in a 1935 plane crash.) For handbags, wallets, gloves, and more, check out **Humawaca**. Need gifts? Head to **Calma Chicha**, a one-stop shop with everything from cowhide rugs to *submarino* glasses, used for hot chocolate the Argentine way, by immersing a thick baton of chocolate into a glass of warm milk. ●

BEFORE YOU GO



FILMS

Evita, a 1996 musical starring Madonna, chronicles the life of Eva Perón, the controversial wife of Argentine ruler Juan Perón. *The Tango Lesson* (1997) follows a British woman obsessed with Argentina's dance.

BOOKS

On Heroes and Tombs (David R Godine, Publisher, 1981), by native Ernesto Sabato, depicts the city in the 1950s. *The Buenos Aires Broken Hearts Club* by Jessica Morrison *(5 Spot, 2003)*, experiences today's B.A. via a millennial narrator.

KEVIN J. MIYAZAKI/REDUX (BROOCH, MUSICIAN)

SMART TRAVELLER

59 **MONEY MANAGER**
Take the kids along on an Amsterdam holiday

64 **CHECKING IN**
Edgy pod-style accommodation that brings you closer to nature



There are many ways to enjoy the canals that crisscross Amsterdam. Visitors can rent a canoe, live on a houseboat, or sign up for a boat tour.

FRANS LEMMENS/PHOTOGRAPHER'S CHOICE/GETTY IMAGES

Child's Play

DESPITE ITS REPUTATION, AMSTERDAM IS SURPRISINGLY FAMILY-FRIENDLY | BY NATASHA SAHGAL

This is *National Geographic Traveller India*'s handy guide to Amsterdam, Netherlands. Our itinerary gives prices for almost everything, so you can plan your trip and modify it depending on your budget. On the basis of this itinerary, the cost for a three-day holiday in Amsterdam for two adults and two children is ₹1,60,000 without airfare. Contrary to popular belief, Amsterdam is a family-friendly city. Kids will love the pancake boat rides, working windmills, cheese farms, and tulip gardens as well as the multitude of museums.

Formerly a fishing village, the canal-side city of Amsterdam has been home to artists like Rembrandt and Delft. It has survived an industrial revolution, suffered during the World Wars, and is now known for its tolerance and laidback arty vibe. Canal belts form concentric circles around the city. Their presence is soothing and the canal houses that line them have distinctive, elegant facades. While Dutch cuisine may not be world-famous or on your must-try list, it's definitely kid-friendly with its extravagant pancakes, cheeses, and comforting meat and potato dishes. The numerous museums around the city are remarkable and most are incredibly child-friendly, free for under 18s, and often take special care to address young visitors. Ignore the hype and the adults-only image of Amsterdam and take the young ones to this gorgeous, amiable city.

GETTING AROUND

Flight If you arrive by air, buy the three-day **Amsterdam Travel Ticket** from the airport *(€25/₹1,750)*. It gives unlimited use of the metros, trams, ferries and night buses operated by GVB within the city, and also includes the train ride from the airport to Amsterdam Centraal railway station.

Train and Bus Trains from around Europe halt at Centraal station. If arriving here, buy a **3-day travel card** *(adults*





Jordaan is an upscale neighbourhood (left) **with a relaxed vibe; The Van Gogh Museum** (right) **has the largest collection of the artist's works.**

€16.50/₹1,157; children 4-11 years €7.50/ ₹525 for a 3-day pass) for unlimited travel in the city, but no airport transfer.

Amsterdam is a very compact city and the tram and metro system are excellent. If you plan to explore more of the Netherlands after your time in Amsterdam, get the **9292**: a real-time public transport app for a smartphone that's very useful for planning travel through the country *(9292.nl/en)*.

City passes like the **Amsterdam Holland pass** and the **I Amsterdam City Card** provide free entry and discounts on passes to many cultural attractions, plus unlimited GVB rides *(from €49/₹3,500)*.

VISA

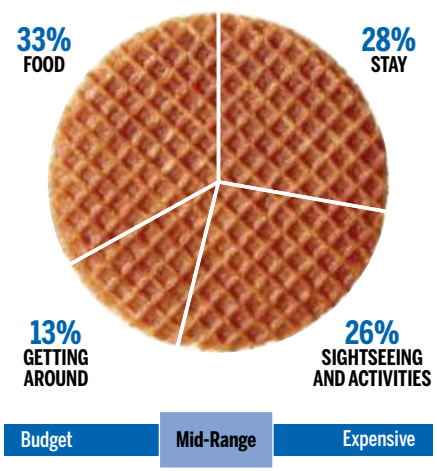
Indian travellers to Amsterdam need a Schengen visa. A short-stay tourist visa costs ₹4,255 and requires confirmed flight tickets and other documents. Visit *www.vfs-nl-in.com* for details.

SLEEP

Amsterdam's Old Centre is the most popular area for tourists, but it gets extremely noisy at night. For families with children, I'd recommend staying in and around the **Canal Belt**. These streets are quiet, but you are still close enough to walk to most of the sights. Live in a traditional Dutch canal house at the **Amsterdam Wiechmann Hotel**. Typical to this kind of structure, the stairs are steep. Ask for a room with a canal view *(Prinsengracht 328-332; www.hotelwiechmann.nl; family room for four from €207/₹15,000)*. For canal views in a more modern setting, **Hotel Pulitzer** has rooms that are small but elegant *(Prinsengracht 315-331; www.pulitzer-amsterdam.com; family room for four from €484/₹35,000)*. **Dikker & Thijs Fenice Hotel** is located near several museums, a tram station, and a canal stop. It's noisy over the weekends so choose this if you plan to party *(Prinsengracht 444; www.dikkerenthijshotel.nl; doubles from €160/₹11,200)*. It is also possible to stay in one of the **houseboats** docked at Old Harbour, a few minutes walk from the city centre. They make for a comfortable and unique experience *(Oosterdok;*

YOUR EXPENSE STATS

This child-friendly holiday in Amsterdam is planned with a mid-range hotel stay, public transport for three days, and sit-down meals in restaurants. Travellers can save money and reduce the overall cost of this trip by staying in a budget place and eating at stalls, fast-food joints, and cheaper places. The other two expenses of getting around and sightseeing will remain the same.



ALVARO LEIVA/AGE FOTOSTOCK/DINODIA (CAFÉ & MUSEUM), BAIBAZ/SHUTTERSTOCK (WAFFLE)

www.myhouseboatamsterdam.com; houseboat for four from €135/₹9,800). **Hotel Van Onna** is great for budget travellers. It is located in the charming **Jordaan** area, which is peaceful but well connected *(Bloemgracht 102-104; hotelvanonna.nl; family room for four from €150/ ₹10,800)*. If you plan to book an apartment through sites like **Airbnb** or **9flats** look for a place in and around Jordaan.

DAY 1

WATER WORLD Begin the day with breakfast at **De Bakkerswinkel**. Their baked goods are delicious and become superlative when eaten with their jams or lemon curd. Juniors can get a fruit-shake while adults can grab their cuppa. Include a yummy quiche to fortify the family for exploring the city *(Warmoesstraat 69; www.debakkerswinkel.com; €50/₹3,490 for four)*. Get your city bearings with a **canal boat cruise** through the 17th-century canals of Amsterdam. The city has over 100 kilometres of four concentric semi-circles of canals. Choose between an hour-long tour or a hop-on-hop-off pass for the day *(cruises begin on Gray line pier 5 near Amsterdam Centraal station; www.canal.nl; adults €16/₹1,120, children €8/₹560; day pass for adults €20/₹1,400, children €10/₹700)*.

NEW AND OLD Back on land, take a leisurely walk towards bustling Dam Square. **The Royal Palace** *(www.paleisamsterdam.nl; open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; adults €10/₹700; visitors under 18 free)*, 15th-century church **Nieuwe Kerk** *(www.nieuwekerk.nl; open 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; adults €8/₹560, children below 11 free)*, and the poignant **National Monument** commemorating the casualties of World War II, are all around the corner from this town square. The Palace is still used by the Dutch monarch, King Willem-Alexander for royal events but is open to the public on other days. For some Dam Square shopping, **De Bijenkorf** is a huge department store with a mix of luxury and everyday brands *(toll free on 0800-0818; open Sun, Mon 11a.m.-8 p.m., Tues, Wed 10 a.m-8 p.m., Thurs, Fri 10 a.m.-9 p.m., Sat 9.30 a.m.-8 p.m.)*. A few lanes away is **Magna Plaza**, a mall worth visiting just for its impressive neo-Gothic style interiors *(open Mon 11 a.m.-7 p.m., Tues-Sat 10 a.m.-7 p.m., Thurs: 10 a.m.-9 p.m., Sun 12 p.m.-7 p.m.)*. Next, head to the **Anne Frank House** museum for a moving experience. See the space that was a silent witness to this young Jewish girl's brief and tragic life. The museum is built on the site where Anne Frank was hiding while she wrote her famous diary. Children who have read this book will appreciate this along with adults. For those unfamiliar with Anne Frank, the museum also has a great family program to acquaint visitors with her story before they go in. Buy museum tickets online to avoid long queues (*Prinsengracht 267; www.annefrank.org; adults €9/₹630, children €4.50/₹300, free for children under 9; open 9 a.m.-9 p.m. April to October and 9 a.m.-7 p.m. from November to March)*. For a dinner children will surely love, head to **The Pancake Bakery**. Dutch pancakes or *pannenkoek* are typically very thin and generously covered with sweet or savoury toppings. The pizza pancakes and *poffertjes* (small buckwheat pancakes) with whipped cream are divine *(Prinsengracht 191; www.pancake.nl; €40/₹2,800 for two)*.





The Netherlands produces about 650 million tonnes of cheese annually and it's a rare visitor that leaves without some (top)**; In summer, canal-side cafés set up al fresco seating** (bottom) .

STREET FOOD FIX Coin-operated deep-fried food vending machines are found across the city—just look for a bright yellow sign and FEBO logo. Use exact

DAVID C PHILLIPS/PASSAGE/CORBIS/IMAGELIBRARY (CHEESE SHOP). WISKERKE/ALAMY/INDIAPICTURE (CAFÉ)



About 40 per cent of Amsterdam's traffic is on bicycles and there are numerous rental points in the city that make it easy for travellers to join in.

change, since the machines do not return money. My favourites were *krokets,* a log-shaped savoury that's crisp outside with a warm meat ragu filling on the inside. Another traditional snack seen at fish stalls around the city is soused herring (raw fish soaked in a mild vinegar preserve) served with chopped onions; it's an acquired taste but the Dutch love it.

DAY 2

PEDAL AWAY THE BLUES After a leisurely breakfast at **Letting** café *(Prinsenstraat 3; www.letting.nl; €24/₹1,685 for two),* walk around the canals and old houses in **Jordaan**. This gentrified neighbourhood is replete with art galleries, boutiques, and restaurants.

Amsterdam makes bicycling easy with special cycling lanes throughout the city, making it a convenient, eco-friendly way to move around. Keep a watch out for cyclists when crossing roads or walking around. A **bicycle tour** of the city or the countryside is a popular way of exploring. My tour covered a visit to the iconic Dutch **windmills**, interactions with **cheese farmers**, and learning how wooden **clogs** are made *(a 3-hour city tour begins at noon and the country tour begins at 11 a.m. every day at Kerkstraat 134; www.mikesbiketoursamsterdam.com; adults €25/₹1,750, children €18/ ₹1,260)*. The bicycle tour is only suitable for children above 13. For younger ones, opt for a city **walking tour**. Sandeman's walking tours meet every day in front of the National Monument on Dam Square at 10 a.m., 11.15 a.m. and 2.15 p.m. Some of the sites covered are the **Jewish Quarter, Old Church**, and the **Narrowest House** in the city *(newamsterdamtours.com; €3/₹210 per person + tip)*.

AFTERNOONS AT THE PARK After all the active exploring, closeby **Vondelpark** is a perfect spot for a break. There's summertime theatre, a lake with ducks, and occasional markets within. If you're with children aged under 10, head to **Kinderkookkafé**, where adults can relax while the children are busy cooking their own pizza and smoothies in the kitchen *(Vondelpark 6B; www.kinderkookkafe.nl; around €10/₹700, depending on dishes cooked)*. Picnic lunches in a cosy spot by the water are also a good idea.

For souvenir shopping, stop at **Leidseplein**, another busy town square. In summer, it is filled with buskers, street performers, and acrobats and in winter, it transforms into an ice skating rink. For a home-cooked Dutch meal, take a short walk to **Hap-Hmm**. Try the meatballs or steak with stroganoff sauce which come in large portions. In typical European style, dinner begins at 4.30 p.m. and the last order is at eight *(Helmersstraat 33; www.hap-hmm.nl; €25/₹1,750 for two; closed weekends)*.

DAY AT THE MUSEUMS Amsterdam is full of fabulous museums. Apart from the big, famous ones, there are smaller curated collections in the eclectic **Torture Museum**, the floating **Houseboat Museum**, and the charming **Doll Museum**. **Museum Quarter** is packed with options, though it's best to spread out the museum visits over different days. The Quarter's crowning glory, the **Rijksmuseum**, chronicles Dutch history and is a treasure trove of works by renowned Dutch painters. I was thrilled to see my first Rembrandt here. The map of the museum specifies a kid-friendly route—with exhibits of dollhouses, airplanes, and a picnic room to create postcards. A special multimedia game is fun for a family to try their hand at solving eight Rijksmuseum mysteries *(Museumstraat 1; daily 9 a.m.-5 p.m.; www.rijksmuseum.nl; adults €17.50/₹1,225, visitors under 18 free; game €2.50/₹175 per device, available at the multimedia desk)*. Art fans can also head to the **Van Gogh Museum** to see the

KAVALENKAU/SHUTTERSTOCK

world's largest dedicated collection from this Post-Impressionist painter *(Paulus Potterstraat 7; daily 9 a.m.-6 p.m.; www.vangoghmuseum.nl; adults €17/₹1,190; visitors under 18 free)*. This year marks the 125th anniversary of van Gogh's death, and there are a number of events across Amsterdam and the Netherlands to commemorate the event. **Rembrandt House Museum** is also unmissable, showcasing where the Dutch painter lived and painted for 20 years *(Jodenbreestraat 4; daily 10 a.m.-6 p.m.; www.rembrandthuis.nl; adults €12.50/₹900, children ages 6-11 €4/₹280)*. Next up is the **NEMO Science Centre**, a hands-on museum for children. It is hard to miss this bright green building shaped like a huge ship. The terrace has a lovely view and café, which does not require a ticket, and is worth a visit *(Oosterdok 2; Tue-Sun 10 a.m.-5.30 p.m.; www.e-nemo.nl; €15/₹1,050)*.

DAY 3

MARKET DAY Start your day at the **Albert Cuyp Market** in De Pijp Quarter a busy, multicultural street market, where you can snack on *stroopwafels*, little poffertjes, or Surinamese food, while scouring for bargains. Look out for delicious old-school Dutch treats like sour hard candy, liquorice, and butter waffle-flavoured sweets (*Albert Cuypstraat; Mon-Sat 9 a.m.-5p.m.)*. Alternatively, grab a quick brunch of juicy burgers at **Burgermeester** *(Albert Cuypstraat 48; www.burgermeester.eu; €40/₹2,800 for two)*.

ZOO STORY Give the kids a treat to remember with a visit to the **Artis Royal Zoo** to get really close to gorillas, giraffes, and zebras. The butterfly pavilion and insectarium are also exceptional so expect to spend at least four hours there *(Plantage Kerklaan; www.artis.nl; adults €19.95/₹1,400, children €16.50/₹1,200)*. If you haven't had your fill of Dutch pancakes yet, get on a **pancake boat ride** and eat to your heart's content. The 75-minute boat ride on the IJ River includes an unlimited supply of pannenkoeken along with various toppings *(boats depart from behind the Amsterdam Centraal station; www.pannenkoekenboot.nl; adults €18.50/₹1,300, children €12.50/₹875)*.





During spring, the colourful tulip gardens of Keukenhof (top) **are a popular day trip from Amsterdam; The windmills of Kinderdijk village** (bottom) **are a UNESCO World Heritage Site.**

WEIGHING IN End the day with a walk through **Nieuwmarkt**, a lively square that is known for its cafés and nightlife. The most prominent building here is the **Waag**, or weigh house. The stately 15th-century building initially served as one of Amsterdam's city gates. Later, it was used as a weigh house, where market goods were weighed. Now, the structure has a popular restaurant on its ground floor. **Restaurant-Café In De Waag** is a cosy candle-lit diner that serves European food made with fresh local ingredients. Their chocolate fondue is a big hit with kids, and adults too *(Nieuwmarkt 4; www.indewaag.nl; €80/ ₹5,600 for four)*.

TULIPS Vibrant, blooming tulips can be seen in their full glory during the pleasant springtime months of March to May. For a quick visit on a busy day head to the city's floating flower market **Bloemenmarkt**, to see these Dutch beauties and buy flowers, seeds, and tulip-themed souvenirs. Otherwise, schedule a trip to the spectacular **Keukenhof Gardens** in Lisse to admire over seven million colourful flowers. Take a picnic lunch with you and set aside at least four hours for this leisurely visit. *(Keukenhof Express buses leave Schiphol Plaza every 15 minutes; adults €16/₹1,120, children €8/₹560.)* ●

BESTWEB/SHUTTERSTOCK (TULIPS), WALTER ZERLA/CULTURA/CORBIS/IMAGELIBRARY (CYCLISTS)

Hot Pods

POD-STYLE ACCOMMODATIONS TO BRING YOU CLOSER TO NATURE | BY RUMELA BASU



Attrap'Rêves Bubbles, France

NATURA VIVE SKYLODGE, PERU

Clinging to a cliff side in Cusco's Sacred Valley, Natura Vive's Skylodge Adventure Suites are transparent capsules—floors too—that offer dizzying views of the Urubamba Valley. To arrive at their rooms, guests hike up 400 metres or zip line across lines laid by Natura Vive. Each pod is made of polycarbonate and aerospace aluminium, powered by solar energy, and holds four people. Greetings from flying condors are complimentary.

● VALLE SAGRADO, PERU; +51-08-4793019, www.naturavive.com; 919PEN/₹18,500 per head, including meals and transportation from the city of Cusco.

WHITEPOD ECO LUXURY HOTEL, SWITZERLAND

The exterior of Whitepod's igloo-like pods in the village of Les Cerniers are colour coordinated with the seasons: White for the snowy winters and green to echo the summer foliage. Each suite is perched on a balcony, and promises the peace of living amidst nature with the comforts of a luxury hotel. Summers are for hiking and winter stays, for skiing—both end with a bottle of wine in the pod.

● LES CERNIERS, SWITZERLAND; +41-24-4713838; www.whitepod.com; doubles from CHF296/₹19,700 in summer and from CHF690/₹45,972 in winter.

ATTRAP'RÊVES BUBBLES, FRANCE

Living in a bubble is not a bad thing if you're staying in one of Attrap Rêves's 18 pods. Spread across five sites in southeast France (close to Marseilles), these transparent bubbles offer views ranging from craggy mountains and lavender fields to azure lakes and pine forests. Each pod has beds, furniture, and attached bubble-shaped bathrooms, ideal for couples or small families. Fall asleep with a view of the night sky, uninterrupted by urban light pollution.

● FRANCE; +33-49-1721089; www.attrap-reves.com; doubles from €109/₹7,700, including breakfast; children under 6 years not allowed.







PHOTO COURTESY: ATTRAP'RÊVES (LARGE PICTURE, BUBBLE AT NIGHT), NATURA VIVE (VALLEY) WHITEPOD ECO LUXURY HOTEL (SNOW-CAPPED MOUNTAIN)

IN FOCUS

66 **STAYS**
A traveller's field guide to the new world of lodging

76 **ADVENTURE**
16 ways to raft, dive, and climb into earth's beating heart

86 **FAMILY TRIP IDEAS**
From Paris to Mexico, vacation ideas for the modern family



66
Barcelona, Spain

PHOTO COURTESY: CASA GRACIA, BARCELONA





9 WAYS TO SLEEP AROUND THE WORLD

A traveller's field guide to the wild new world of lodging

BY MARGARET LOFTUS & OTHERS

Fall asleep swaying

in the breeze in a hand-hewn wooden orb suspended in the coastal rain forest of Canada's Vancouver Island. Kick back in a sunny, art-filled SoHo flat stocked with fluffy hotel towels, Kiehl's bath products, and an iPhone loaded with your host's tips on the neighbourhood's finest. Check out a pair of your hotel's Google Glass eyewear for a tech-enhanced spin around San Francisco.

"For millennials, the thought of staying in a hotel that's exactly like a hotel in another city is a negative, unlike in other generations when it was a selling point," says Bjorn Hanson, a hospitality professor at New York University. And no matter their age, Hanson says, travellers now look to lodging as an extension of the destination, often favouring novelty and cultural relevance over minibars and late checkout. The result is a staggering array of new ways to sleep away from home.

Free Spirit Spheres see all seasons among the tall trees of Vancouver Island along Canada's west coast.

FERRARI/ACE PICTURES





SUSPENDED SUITES

Up in the Air

Land accommodation is too mainstream for some, but thankfully for these boundary-pushing travellers, there are hotels that feel the same way.

WHERE TO FIND Somewhere between a tree house and a wooden boat, **Free Spirit Spheres** are suspended in Vancouver Island's rainforest with little besides the trees to distract their inhabitants. Visitors say the effect verges on the spiritual *(freespiritspheres.com; doubles from CAD180/₹9,000).* Six imaginatively designed rooms suspended 4-6 metres above ground make up **The Treehotel** in the woods of Harads, Sweden, just 50 kilometres south of the Arctic Circle. Rooms are named and resemble a Bird's Nest, UFO, or a Mirrorcube. They are accessed by wooden bridges, retractable stairs, and walkways amidst treetops *(treehotel.se; doubles from SEK4,700/₹34,700).* Sleep in raindrop-shaped **Tree Tents** at the Hertshoorn campground near Garderen, an hour from Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Green tents are suspended from trees on a secluded spot at the campsite and guests climb into the bulbous belly via a wooden ladder. Each tent has a light, wooden base and mattresses that can accommodate two adults and two children. *(www.ardoer.com/en/camping/hertshoorn/verhuur/tree-tent; prices from €56/₹3,930 for 4 people.)*
BEST FOR Travellers who are unafraid of heights and in love with the outdoors
CAVEAT Getting to some of these accommodations may involve a little hiking and climbing.
TIP Read up on birds of the region so you can identify the twittering creatures outside your window.

GLAMPING

Frills and Wildlife Thrills

Experience the thrills of living close to nature, with top-notch food, luxurious spa treatments, and dirty martinis by the bonfire.

WHERE TO FIND The brainchild of a family of wildlife lovers and conservationists, **The Bison Resort**, Karnataka, is a cross between an African wildlife camp and Raj-era hunting lodge. The luxurious tents are on the bank of the Kabini River, and each has sit-outs offering stunning views of the jungle. Its proximity to Nagarhole and Bandipur national parks ensures great sightings *(thebisonresort.com; doubles from ₹11,000, including all meals).* At the sumptuous **Sher Bagh** in Rajasthan, recount Ranthambore tiger tales with a chilled G&T. The resort has won accolades for its green initiatives. Its 12 luxury tents are done up in the polished safari style favoured by royals of the 1920s *(sujanluxury.com; doubles from ₹35,000, including all meals).* **Banjaar Tola** in Kanha National Park, puts the spotlight on the region's wildlife and the rich traditions of Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. Evening safaris are followed by dips in the tree-shaded swimming pool and elaborate dinners served under the stars *(www.tajsafaris.com; doubles ₹43,600, including meals, park fees, and two jungle drives daily).*
BEST FOR Nature enthusiasts who want to experience the wild in style and comfort.
CAVEAT Luxury camping experiences often come at a premium heftier than 5-star properties.
TIP Plan visits according to your wildlife wish list. Summers are brutal but are good for tiger spotting.

Top: **The tents at Sher Bagh, Rathambore, are furnished with Edwardian furniture. Sun beds, hammocks, armchairs, and mud-decks scattered around the camp create quiet, shaded places to unwind and admire the wild setting.**

Facing page: **The Mirrorcube room in Sweden's Treehotel is camouflaged by reflective glass exteriors. The cube is coated with a transparent ultraviolet paint visible only to birds, to prevent them from colliding with the glass.**

PHOTO COURTESY: **SHER BAGH**, PHOTO COURTESY: **THE TREEHOTEL** (FACING PAGE)



PHOTO COURTESY: CORNER COURTYARD

BOUTIQUE HOTELS IN INDIA

Outside Inside

Today's boutique hotels embrace their city's past and celebrate its eccentricities. They are perfectly suited to travellers seeking stays that distil the spirit of their destination.

WHERE TO FIND Like so many residences in Mumbai, **Abode** in Colaba has mostly matchbox-sized rooms. But the 20-room hotel is so ingeniously designed, guests are too busy Instagramming their digs (and taking notes for their own homes) to mind. Rooms have teakwood and Minton-tiled flooring, art-deco furniture, and framed art works by some of India's best graphic designers *(abodeboutiquehotels.com, doubles from ₹3,500 plus taxes, including breakfast)*. The **Corner Courtyard** in Kolkata and **Amarya Villa** in Delhi have bolder, brighter aesthetics and rooms with deep crimson and sunshine-yellow walls. Both hotels were once stately homes that have been lovingly repurposed into lodgings that are contemporary, chic, and unabashedly Indian *(www.thecornercourtyard.com, from ₹5,000 plus taxes, including breakfast; www.amaryagroup.com; doubles from ₹5,330)*. **Le Dupleix** in Pondicherry prefers the vintage aesthetic. The tasteful hotel occupies the 18th-century home of the last French mayor of Pondicherry. It was restored over four years, following traditional methods of construction, down to the Chettinad egg plaster that gives the snow-white walls its subtle shine *(ledupleix.in; doubles from ₹5,000 including breakfast)*. **Nilaya Hermitage** in Goa has used local materials like laterite stone and a vaguely Moorish aesthetic to create villas that blend in harmoniously with its habitat, but are striking on the inside (the spa is a brilliant lapis blue). A far cry from party Goa, Nilaya encourages guests to slow down, take a yoga class, or a leisurely dip in their freshwater pool *(www.nilaya.com; doubles from ₹18,000, including breakfast and dinner)*.

BEST FOR Folks who appreciate edgy design.

CAVEAT Hanging with the cool crowd sometimes comes at the sacrifice of old-school niceties such as valet parking, porters, and 24-hour room service.

TIP Build time into your stay to soak up the scene.





Top: **The Abode in Mumbai blends colonial charm with modern-day chic. The boutique hotel in the heritage district of Colaba, has art deco furniture, serves Mumbai-inspired food, and has a casual café vibe.**

Facing page: **Rooms at The Corner Courtyard in Kolkata are named after colours. Vermilion has bright red accents, Ivory and Charcoal are done up in muted monochromes, and Indigo (pictured) has a wall with blue motifs.**

PHOTO COURTESY: ABODE

PEER-TO-PEER LODGING

Live With (Charming) Stranger

Struggling to make rent on their San Francisco loft in 2007, two friends invited some out-of-towners to crash in their living room to earn extra cash. Fast forward eight years, and their scheme, **Airbnb**—estimated to be worth several billion dollars—has upended the hospitality trade, spawning numerous competitors.

Experts say there's more fuelling the phenomenon than the saving a few bucks. "[Guests] feel connected to the community in a way that's more genuine," says Arun Sundararajan, a New York University business professor who studies the sharing economy. "You can ask a hotel concierge for local activities, but that always has a commercial sheen."

WHERE TO FIND Covering more than 34,000 cities, Airbnb's spectrum is astonishing—from pullout couches to historic castles and solar-panelled spaces. The digs on **nightswapping.com**, a cash-free exchange based on credits, range from an apartment guest room in Bangkok to a villa in Cuba. **Onefinestay.com** lists only townhouses in the most affluent zip codes of New York, Los Angeles, London, and Paris and stocks them with the sort of high-count linens, plush towels, and soaps you'd expect at the Four Seasons, as well as an iPhone loaded with host tips. The formula was a hit with Felicia Newberry, who spent a weekend at a SoHo apartment rented through the service. She likens the experience to taking the train instead of flying: "It's more of a story."

BEST FOR Extroverts who crave a local link (choose rentals where the hosts are present) as well as introverts who steer clear of bed-and-breakfasts (search "entire place" when booking).

CAVEAT Booking typically requires more steps, such as verifying your identity. And renters beware: Some cities, such as Charleston, U.S.A., ban rentals for less than 30 days; crackdowns on violations could lead to cancellations.

TIP Before booking that "charming," "strategically located" house, take a virtual tour of the neighbourhood with Google Maps Street View.





BUDGET STAYS

Reconsider the Hostel

A modest budget no longer means shabby accommodation in sketchy neighbourhoods. There's a new wave of hostels in India and abroad with squeaky clean rooms, laundry services, airy kitchens, and hosts eager to show you their neighbourhood. Instant connections, camaraderie, and Wi-Fi are free.

WHERE TO FIND The **Old Quarter hostel** in Panjim's lovely neighbourhood of Fontainhas, occupies two buildings: a refurbished 17-century structure with bright, azulejo-style motifs painted on its facade, and a Portuguese home that dates back to the 18th century. Choose between clean dormitories, air-conditioned deluxe rooms, and double rooms with sprawling bathrooms *(thehostelcrowd.com; from ₹450, including breakfast)*. In Varanasi, the hostel chain **Zostel** offers clean accommodation and access to a fully stocked kitchen. Their common room has funky murals, board games, and video game consoles for travellers who never want to call it a night *(www.zostel.com; from ₹499)*. **Vedanta**

PHOTO COURTESY: **CASA GRACIA** (BEDS), PHOTO COURTESY: **OLD QUARTER HOSTEL** (WALL)

Wake up! in Kerala's surf town Varkala has dorms and pretty bamboo huts, and organises music and movie nights, and walking tours of the beach town *(vedantawakeup.com; from ₹400)*. Across the seas in **Casa Gracia**, Barcelona, travellers spend their time lounging around the terrace, crooning at the hostel's karaoke nights, or discussing the artworks of Spanish artists displayed in the dining area *(casagraciabcn.com, from ₹1,500)*.

BEST FOR Comfortable, low-budget travel.

CAVEAT Most hostels never sleep. Carry those earplugs.

TIP Keep the itinerary flexible to accommodate last-minute plans with fellow travellers. You might be surprised.

HOTEL GADGETS

Tech Yourself Out

Mid-century Americans checked into hotels to give air-conditioning and colour TV a whirl, before such appliances became household staples. Travellers still look to hotels to test-drive technology, and hotels hoping to appeal to digital natives are tripping over their discarded Ethernet cords to one-up each other with tech flash—from the cool to the curious.

WHERE TO FIND At San Francisco's **Stanford Court**, the Google Glass Explorer Package includes overnight accommodations and the use of the glasses, along with tips, such as how not to be a "glasshole" (ask a person's permission before snapping a photo of them, for one). The hotel is also working on a lobby tech bar with devices like Fitbits and GoPro cameras available for checkout, plus nostalgic throwbacks, including Atari and the Sony Walkman *(stanfordcourt.reztrip.com; doubles from $263/₹16,800)*. At the new 230-room **citizenM** in New York City, guests check in on touchscreen kiosks and control the room temperature, television, window blinds, and lighting with the swipe of a "Moodpad" tablet *(citizenm.com; doubles from $407/₹26,000)*. Times Square's futuristic **Yotel New York** features a Jetsons-like robotic luggage handler and a motorised bed that expands with the touch of a button *(yotel.com; doubles from $189/₹12,100)*. Guests at **Hiltons** worldwide solicit local advice by directing questions on Twitter to @HiltonSuggests. And no more rousting knocks from housekeeping at the **Umstead Hotel and Spa** in Cary, North Carolina: A motion-detecting system tells management if a room is occupied *(theumstead.com; doubles from $529/₹33,900)*.

BEST FOR Early adopters, the digitally unchallenged and gadget freaks.

CAVEAT Luddites, leave your pride at home: Dial the front desk for help, or miss out on the fun.

TIP Follow hotel brands on social media for perks that range from loyalty points to free nights.



NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM

Be an Exhibitionist

Why let kids have all the slumber party fun? Last August, New York's **American Museum of Natural History** hosted an adults-only sleepover—complete with three-course dinner and curator presentation—in a spin-off of its hugely popular Night at the Museum series for kids. The roster for 2015 is on their website; meanwhile, more museums are rolling out the sleeping bags *(amnh.org; $350/₹22,400)*.

WHERE TO FIND With stand-up comedy, a show on the sex lives of insects, a movie marathon, edible insect snacks, and a cash bar, the adult sleepover at London's **Natural History Museum**, dubbed Dino Snores for Grown-Ups, feels more frat party than field trip *(nhm.ac.uk; £180/₹18,000)*. The **Smithsonian's National Zoo** in Washington, D.C., keeps it to a dull roar by comparison, with a wine and cheese welcome, a keeper-led tour of the exhibits, and a tent *(nationalzoo.si.edu; $130/₹8,300)*. The **Rubin Museum** in New York hosts a "dream-over" each May; last year's participants slept next to a piece of art selected for them and, the next morning, had their dreams interpreted *(rubinmuseum.org)*.

BEST FOR Science and art nuts who fantasise about cuddling up to their favourite exhibits.

CAVEAT You can pretty much guarantee this won't be the best sleep you've ever had.

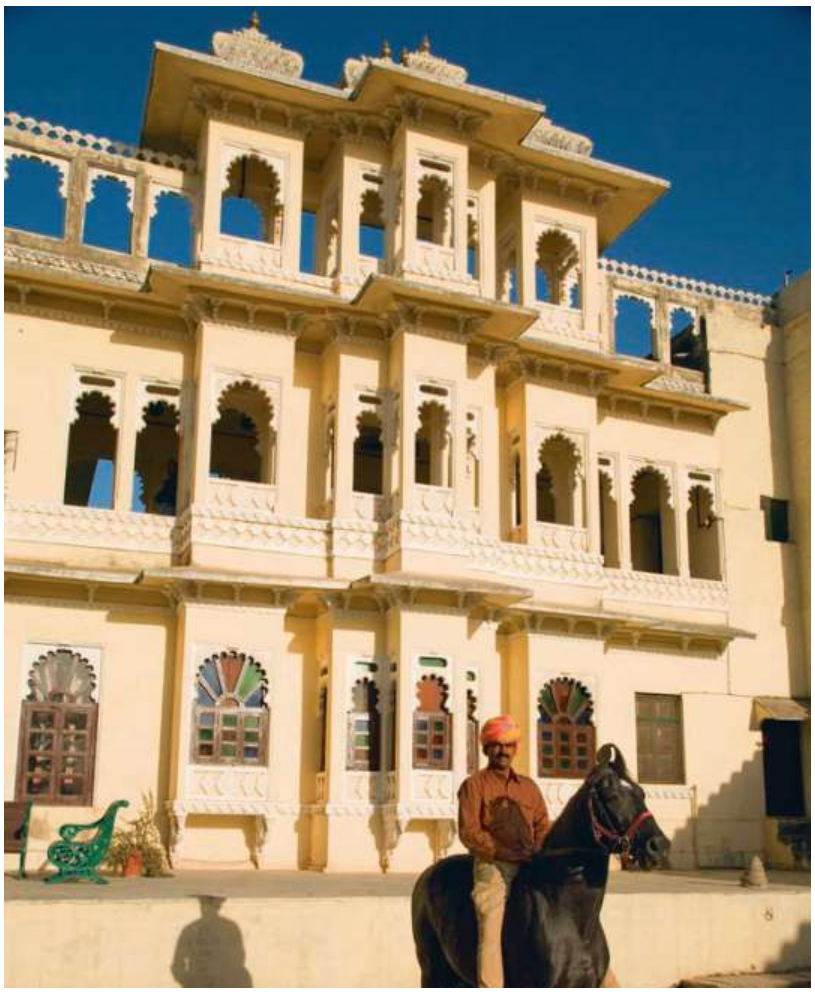
TIP Keep an eye out for website announcements if you're planning a trip to any of these cities. Some events sell out within hours.

Top: **Self-service kiosks at Yotel New York provide automated, no-queue check-in services round the clock.**

Facing page: **City hostels like the Casa Gracia in Barcelona** (top) **and Old Quarter in Panjim** (bottom) **offer lively, informal, and comfortable lodging where fellow travellers can interact.**

RANDY DUCHAINE/ALAMY/INDIAPICTURE





THEMED HOLIDAYS

Reel Living

For film buffs seeking lodging with a touch of drama, these suites bring alive famous reel experiences. Be warned: They're not all shiny, happy movies.

WHERE TO FIND At the family-run **Highlands Park** in Gulmarg, Jammu and Kashmir, traditional Kashmiri hospitality meets celluloid history. The hotel's Bobby suite isn't just any-old hotel room—it's the one in which Bollywood darlings Rishi Kapoor and Dimple Kapadia were locked up for the famous 1970s hit "Hum Tum Ek Kamre Mein Bandh Ho". The hotel is a favourite among cinema fans and the Bollywood film fraternity, who often stay here while shooting against the backdrop of spectacular snow-covered slopes *(www.highlandspark.in; doubles from ₹18,500)*. In contrast, **Ravla Khempur**, tucked away in the heart of Mewar, Rajasthan, is relatively unknown. It was just another heritage haveli until a bunch of ruddy, greying Englishmen and women propelled it into the big leagues. Stay here to relive scenes from the charming *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*. Like the characters, you too might encounter pigeons nesting outside your windows when you unlatch the shutters *(www.ravlakhempur.com; doubles from ₹5,500)*. Far away in Oregon, U.S.A., **Timberline Lodge** was rendered legendary by Stanley Kubrick, who shot parts of his terrifying horror masterpiece *The Shining* here. Room 217, which features in the original Stephen King novel, is the most wanted room of them all *(www.timberlinelodge.com; doubles from $245/₹15,700)*.

IP-ZERO 03 /INDIAPICTURE (COTTAGES), RUPERT SAGAR-MUSGRAVE/ALAMY/INDIAPICTURE (MAN ON HORSE)

BEST FOR Film enthusiasts and fans.
CAVEAT These hotels have film cred but may not be luxurious or have amenities like Wi-Fi.
TIP Watch the films before you visit so that the hotels come alive.

ALL-INCLUSIVE RESORTS

Paid, Sealed, Delivered

Most Indian travellers have at some point contemplated a hotel "package." In India these usually include accommodation, a few meals, and a few extras thrown in. What we are not accustomed to is the "all-inclusive" concept made famous by resorts in the Caribbean. In theory, "all-inclusive" means that guests pay one price, and once they are lying by the resort's infinity pool, they do not have to dip into their pockets—not for food, drinks, alcohol, or resort activities. Most loved by travellers who want a stress-free, tip-free, calculation-free holiday is the kind of resort that covers these key areas: meals that aren't limited to the buffets but allow access to à la carte restaurants on-site, unlimited alcoholic and soft drinks, entertainment for children, some activity and spa treatments as well as night entertainment for adults, tips and gratuities.

WHERE TO FIND From Cancun, Mexico to Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic, the Caribbean region has hundreds of resorts offering all-inclusive deals. In Punta Cana, the very family-friendly **The Reserve at Paradisus** has thought of almost everything a family could wish for with meals and plenty of activities *(www.paradisus.com; from $500/₹32,000 per day for a family of four sharing a suite)*. In Castries, St. Lucia, **The BodyHoliday Resort** is popular not least because the tariff includes a daily spa treatment, scuba diving, and tennis lessons *(www.thebodyholiday.com; from $650/₹41,700 per couple)*. Also on St. Lucia is **Sandals Grande St. Lucian Spa & Beach Resort** in Gros Islet, which gets the thumbs up for views and outstanding service from couples looking for a hassle-free, one-price-tag romantic break with unlimited water sports thrown in *(www.sandals.com; from $590/₹37,800 per couple per night)*. Closer home in the Maldives the **Centara Grand Island Resort & Spa** reopens after a renovation on 1 September. Its luxurious over-water villas are as much the attraction as its all-inclusive deals that keep adults and children occupied with water activities *(www.centarahotelsresorts.com; from $2,874/₹1,84,300 for 3 nights for a couple)*. Less expensive is **Meeru Island Resort and Spa** which among other amenities has six bars and a 24-hour unlimited drinks policy; it could be just the place for those who can't stop making merry *(www.meeru.com; doubles from $317/₹20,000 per night for a couple)*.

BEST FOR Lovers of sand, sea, and R&R and a hassle-free holiday where you know exactly how much you will spend.
CAVEAT Don't expect five-star luxury if rates are super-cheap. If you don't like buffet meals check in advance if your package allows à la carte meals at the resort's restaurants.
TIP Always check the fine print. While resorts often fall over each other to provide more and more inclusions for guests, every resort does have some exclusions.

Bottom: **Set in a private cove in St. Lucia in the Caribbean, The BodyHoliday has all the facilities and activities that holidaymakers have to come to expect from an all-inclusive resort.**

Facing page: **Hotel Highlands Park** (top) **in Gulmarg is famous for its guestlist that has included Shah Rukh Khan, Anushka Sharma, Yash Chopra, and stars of the film *Bobby*; Ravla Khempur** (bottom), **the haveli featured in the *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, is the erstwhile home of the local chieftain or *ravla*. It has of a team of pedigreed Marwari and Kathiawari horses, and guests can explore Khempur on horseback.**

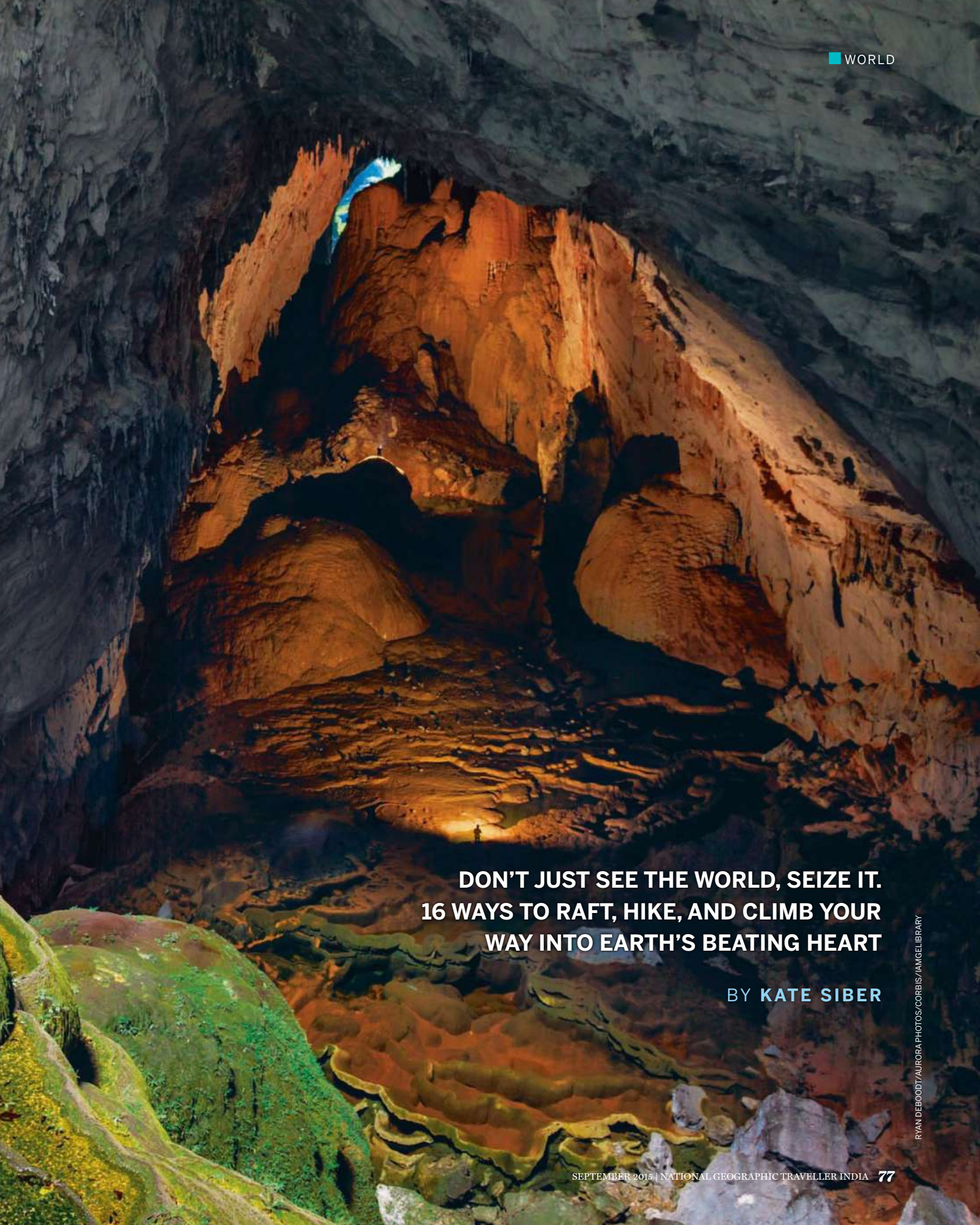


PHOTO COURTESY: BODY HOLIDAY

ADVENTURES IN WONDERLANDS



Soaking in the view while exploring Vietnam's vast Sơn Đoòng Cave.



DON'T JUST SEE THE WORLD, SEIZE IT. 16 WAYS TO RAFT, HIKE, AND CLIMB YOUR WAY INTO EARTH'S BEATING HEART

BY **KATE SIBER**

RYAN DEBOODT/AURORA PHOTOS/CORBIS/IAMGELIBRARY



Up close with a whale shark in the Sea of Cortez, off Mexico's Baja California peninsula.

GO DEEP

OUTSIZE ENCOUNTERS IN THE OCEANS AND UNDER THE EARTH



DELVE INTO DATA

20
TYPICAL WEIGHT, IN TONNES, OF A WHALE SHARK

3,000
THE NUMBER OF SPECIES OF FISH FOUND IN THE WATERS OFF SIPADAN ISLAND

600
THE HEIGHT, IN FEET, OF THE CEILING IN SOME OF THE CHAMBERS OF SO'N ĐOÒNG CAVE

190
AGE, IN MILLIONS OF YEARS, OF THE NAVAJO SANDSTONE IN THE ZION NARROWS

Swim With Whale Sharks, Mexico

Goosebumps. That's what snorkelling near a bus-size shark can give you. Floating on the surface of the Sea of Cortez, off the coast of Baja California in Mexico, you see nothing but shades of aquamarine water below. Then, a shadow emerges from the deep, and the outline of a huge whale shark looms into view: the unmistakable dorsal and pectoral fins, the square head, and the powerful crescent-shaped tail. Even though these ancient fish are plankton eaters, your skin still prickles as they approach. Swim as fast as you can as the largest fish in the sea, graced with unique patterns of stripes and dots, glides by. In a matter of moments, it disappears back into the deep blue.

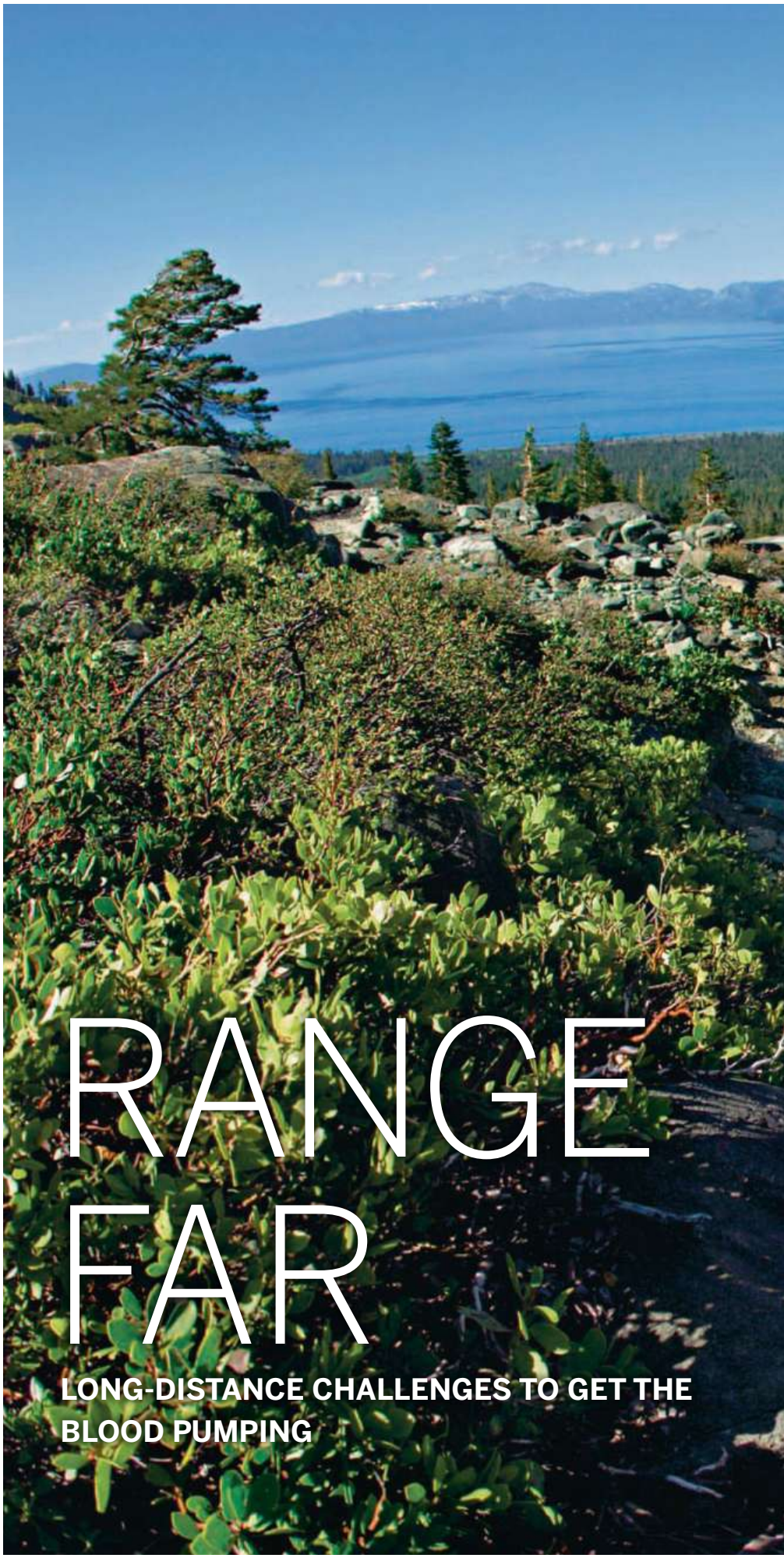
MORE ACTION

Dive in Sipadan, Malaysia Off the coast of Sabah in East Malaysia, the blue waters around the small, protected island of Sipadan are dense with marine life. Hover over immense schools of fish and beautiful turtles, and swim alongside hammerhead and whale sharks. Not surprisingly, it's ranked among the top diving sites in the world.

Explore Sơn Đoòng Cave, Vietnam Hike through the dense jungles of Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park, where Vietnam's famous, and the world's largest cave is located. Scale its exquisite limestone formations, examine the unusual flora that thrives here, and camp near the water bodies inside. Sơn Đoòng's biggest chamber is tall enough to fit a 40-storey skyscraper and wide enough to hold a Boeing 747 airplane.

Hike the Zion Narrows, U.S.A. The Zion Narrows in Utah is often dubbed a natural cathedral, for its soaring red-sandstone cliffs and the almost spiritual reverence its voluptuous curves inspire. Most visitors walk up the canyon a couple of kilometres, experiencing sections as narrow as 20 feet, and then turn around. For a more secluded experience, start at the top of the canyon and hike the whole 26-kilometre stretch in one or two days.

BRANDON COLE



RANGE FAR

LONG-DISTANCE CHALLENGES TO GET THE BLOOD PUMPING

Go Wild on the Pacific Crest Trail, U.S.A.

The PCT is revelling in the spotlight, thanks to the memoir of one devoted long-distance hiker, bestselling author of *Wild,* Cheryl Strayed (and the film starring Reese Witherspoon that followed). But there's only so much a book—or movie—can reveal about a 4,265-kilometre route that stretches from Mexico to Canada and beelines straight through some of Western America's most bewitching landscapes. Passing rolling desert, granite peaks in the Sierra Nevada, glass-still lakes in Oregon, and Washington's rounded volcanoes, hikers gain a visceral sense of scale. "You go back to the simplest form of living, and you realise that everything you thought you needed to survive, you don't," says April Sylva, another long-distance hiker who completed the trail. "You start to see the world and humanity in a different way—with a whole new appreciation."

MORE ACTION

Bicycle Circuit, Iceland Along the 1,336-kilometre Ring Road that circumnavigates Iceland, cyclists encounter all of this country's spectacular extremes, from glaciers to geysers; immense black-rock moonscapes to booming waterfalls; and glacial pools bobbing with blue icebergs to wilderness hot springs just big enough for two.

Horseback Ride, Mongolia On a trip through the Mongolian steppes, horseback riders meet nomadic herders, visit a 16th-century monastery, and listen to the sound of traditional Mongolian throat singing.

Sea Kayak, Canada It's impressive to see the old-growth rainforests, ragged granite shorelines, and clear shallows of British Columbia's sparsely populated coast from the vantage point of a kayak. But it's hard to beat the moment when you lock eyes with a curious orca emerging within feet of your kayak and disappearing into the water as gracefully as it came.



Side trip off the Pacific Crest Trail to South Lake Tahoe, California.

JUSTIN BAILIE/AURORA PHOTOS

RUNNING THE NUMBERS

5

NUMBER OF MONTHS IT TAKES TO WALK THE ENTIRE PACIFIC CREST TRAIL

3,23,000

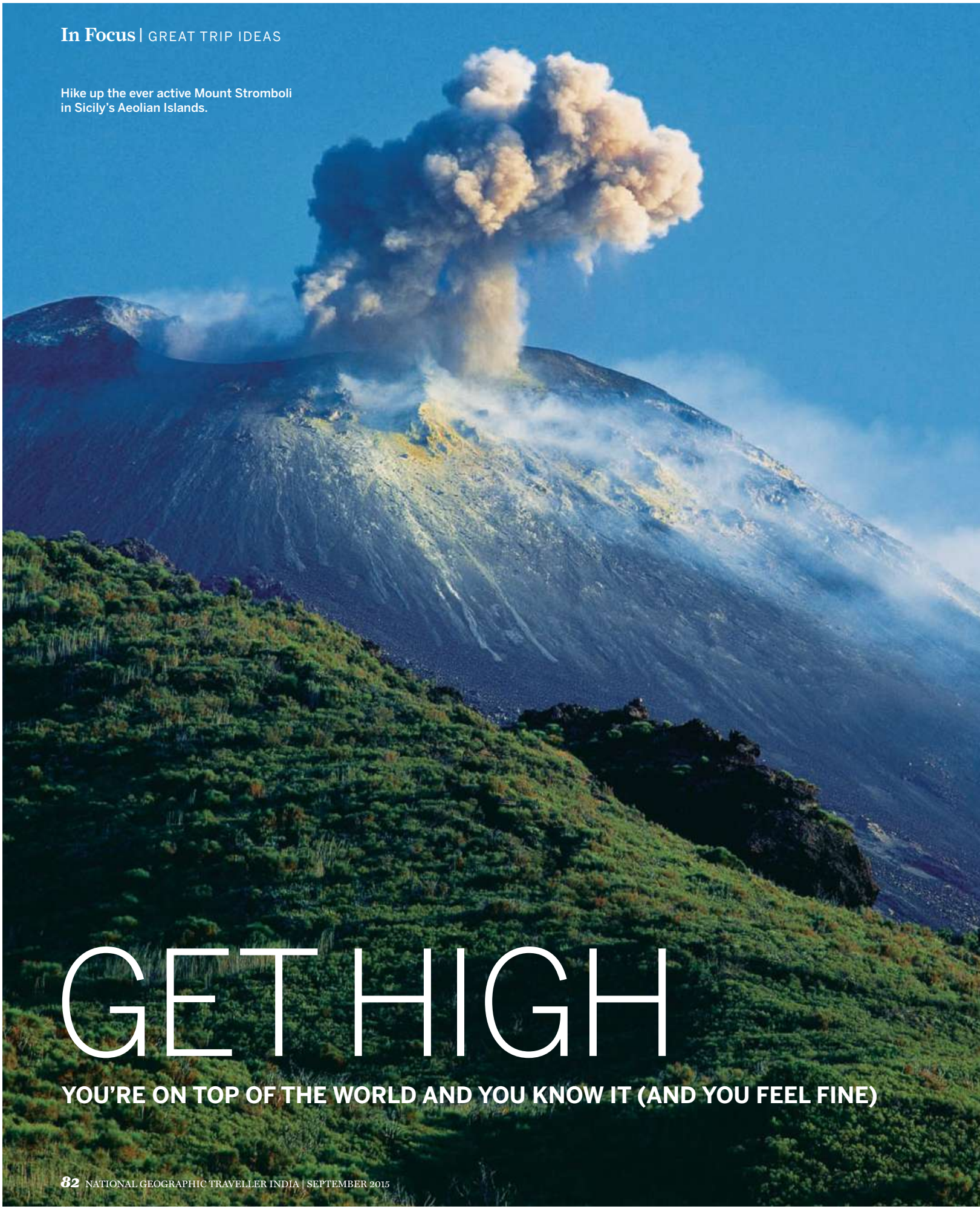
POPULATION OF ICELAND, AN ALMOST EMPTY COUNTRY

15,64,093

MONGOLIA'S TOTAL AREA, IN SQUARE KILOMETRES, MOST OF WHICH IS GRASSLAND AND DESERT

14

PERCENTAGE OF PROTECTED LAND IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA



Hike up the ever active Mount Stromboli in Sicily's Aeolian Islands.

GET HIGH

YOU'RE ON TOP OF THE WORLD AND YOU KNOW IT (AND YOU FEEL FINE)



TALLY IT UP

2,000
NUMBER OF YEARS SCIENTISTS ESTIMATE STROMBOLI HAS BEEN CONTINUOUSLY ERUPTING

15
NUMBER OF NAMED PEAKS OVER 23,000 FEET IN UTTARAKHAND

200
APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF STRUCTURES AT INTRICATELY PLANNED MACHU PICCHU

3,000
APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF GLACIERS IN NEW ZEALAND

Climb Stromboli, Italy

Only rarely does the fiery inner soul of the planet reveal itself—except on Stromboli, one of Sicily's Aeolian Islands that spews lava almost constantly. Just before sunset, hikers pant up over 3,000 vertical feet of heather, fragrant herbs, and black ash to a perch right above the crater. There, amid the swirling green gases, the volcano bursts into action every two minutes to two hours with an explosion of hot glowing lava that, at times, arcs over 1,200 feet into the air. "You cannot believe what you are seeing," says Lorenzo Russo, a guide for Magmatrek, a hiking outfitter. "It is one of the most incredible natural spectacles. People are speechless, then they all say 'Wooooooooooow.'" After the fireworks, skid down soft black ash as the light fades over the Mediterranean.

MORE ACTION

Dayara Bugyal to Dodital Trek, Uttarakhand, India The stunning high-altitude meadow of Dayara Bugyal is cradled by snow-capped Himalayan peaks. To reach this grassland, trekkers must traverse lakes and dense forests, and are treated to breathtaking panoramas and vivid skies along the way. Though the more popular route is a six-day trek that starts and ends in Barsu, Uttarkashi, plan an alternative route, which is more challenging and adds three days, ending in Dodital instead.

Trek the Salkantay Route, Peru Every year, thousands hike the Inca Trail to see Machu Picchu, but only a few choose the newer alternative route: the Salkantay. Wind 63 kilometres around 20,000-foot peaks, cloud forests, and coffee plantations for views of the storied mountain ruins shrouded in mist.

Tread on a Glacier, New Zealand On a three-day Ball Pass Crossing trek in New Zealand's Southern Alps, hikers manoeuvre scree and meadows to see Tasman Glacier up close. An easy shortcut: Take a helicopter or ski-plane.

SAFFO ALESSANDRO/SIME/ESTOCK PHOTO

Raft the Zambezi, Zambia

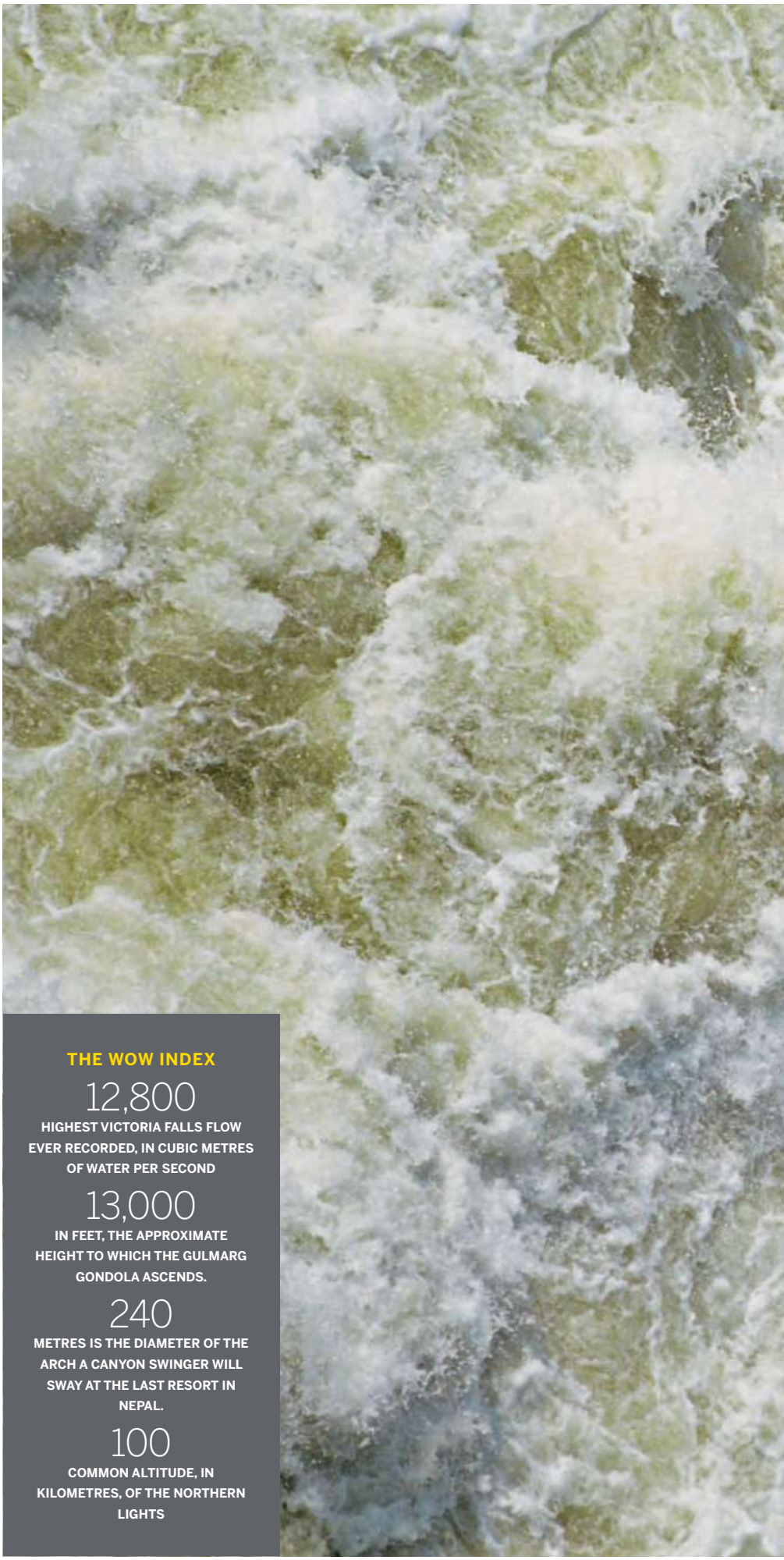
There's at least one thing more exciting than feeling the rumble of the 355-foot Victoria Falls: riding all of that water as it funnels into a gorge studded with boulders and menaced by drops. This stretch of the Zambezi River, on the border between Zimbabwe and Zambia, is considered some of the best white water in the world. "It's an amazing journey for some, a life-changing event to be in wilderness like this," says Matt Gontram, a raft guide and owner of outfitter Global Descents. Over six days, catapult into wave trains that top 30 feet and rush churning pools of white and green. Watch as wild animals—hippos, crocs, baboons, and vervet monkeys—parade by in the water and on the shores, and giant basalt cliffs tower into the sky.

MORE ACTION

Snowboarding, Kashmir Gulmarg is as popular with honeymooning couples in the summer as it is with sports enthusiasts in the peak of winter. Find your balance with snowboarding first-timers or whizz down the dizzying slopes with professionals, some of whom even come from countries like Switzerland.

Canyon Swing, Nepal At The Last Resort, close to the Tibetan border in Nepal, a canyon swing involves leaping off a platform on a suspension bridge 160 metres above the Bhote Kosi River. After the free fall is arrested, jumpers swing back and forth in the gorge as if they were a pendulum. Even adrenaline junkies have been known to get cold feet.

Witness the Northern Lights, Norway In the wilds beyond Tromsø, cross-country ski or ride in a reindeer-pulled sled to watch arcs, curtains, and bands of greenish light tango across the sky.



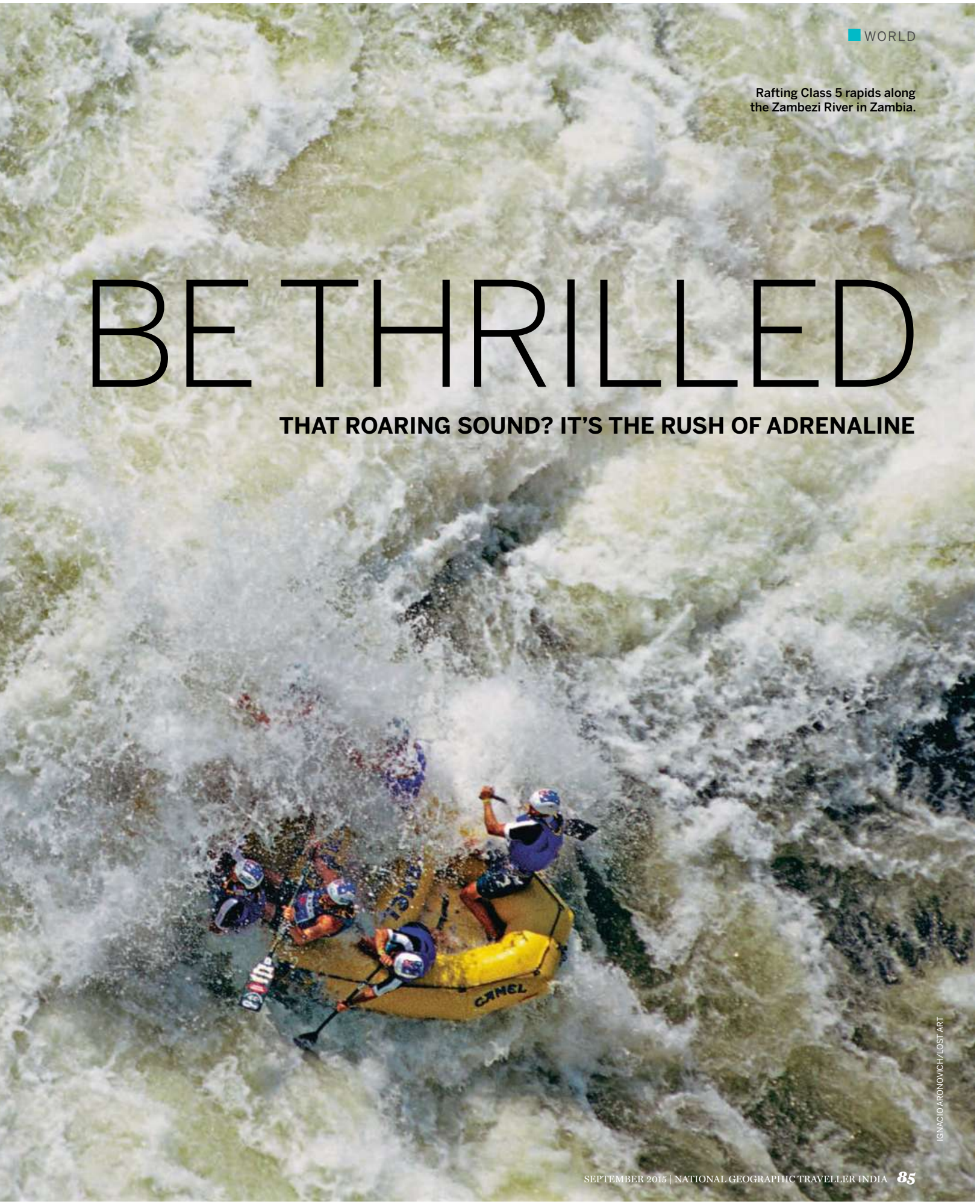
THE WOW INDEX

12,800
HIGHEST VICTORIA FALLS FLOW EVER RECORDED, IN CUBIC METRES OF WATER PER SECOND

13,000
IN FEET, THE APPROXIMATE HEIGHT TO WHICH THE GULMARG GONDOLA ASCENDS.

240
METRES IS THE DIAMETER OF THE ARCH A CANYON SWINGER WILL SWAY AT THE LAST RESORT IN NEPAL.

100
COMMON ALTITUDE, IN KILOMETRES, OF THE NORTHERN LIGHTS



Rafting Class 5 rapids along the Zambezi River in Zambia.

BE THRILLED

THAT ROARING SOUND? IT'S THE RUSH OF ADRENALINE

IGNACIO ARONOVICH/LOST ART



The awesome Mayan ruins of Chichén Itzá in Mexico enthral visitors of all ages.



TAILORED TRIPS FOR THE MODERN FAMILY

The family vacation, like the concept of family itself, has evolved. Kids are travelling with grandma, or a single parent, or an indulgent uncle (or all three). However you define your kin, we have an itinerary that's all relative.

YUCATÁN, MEXICO

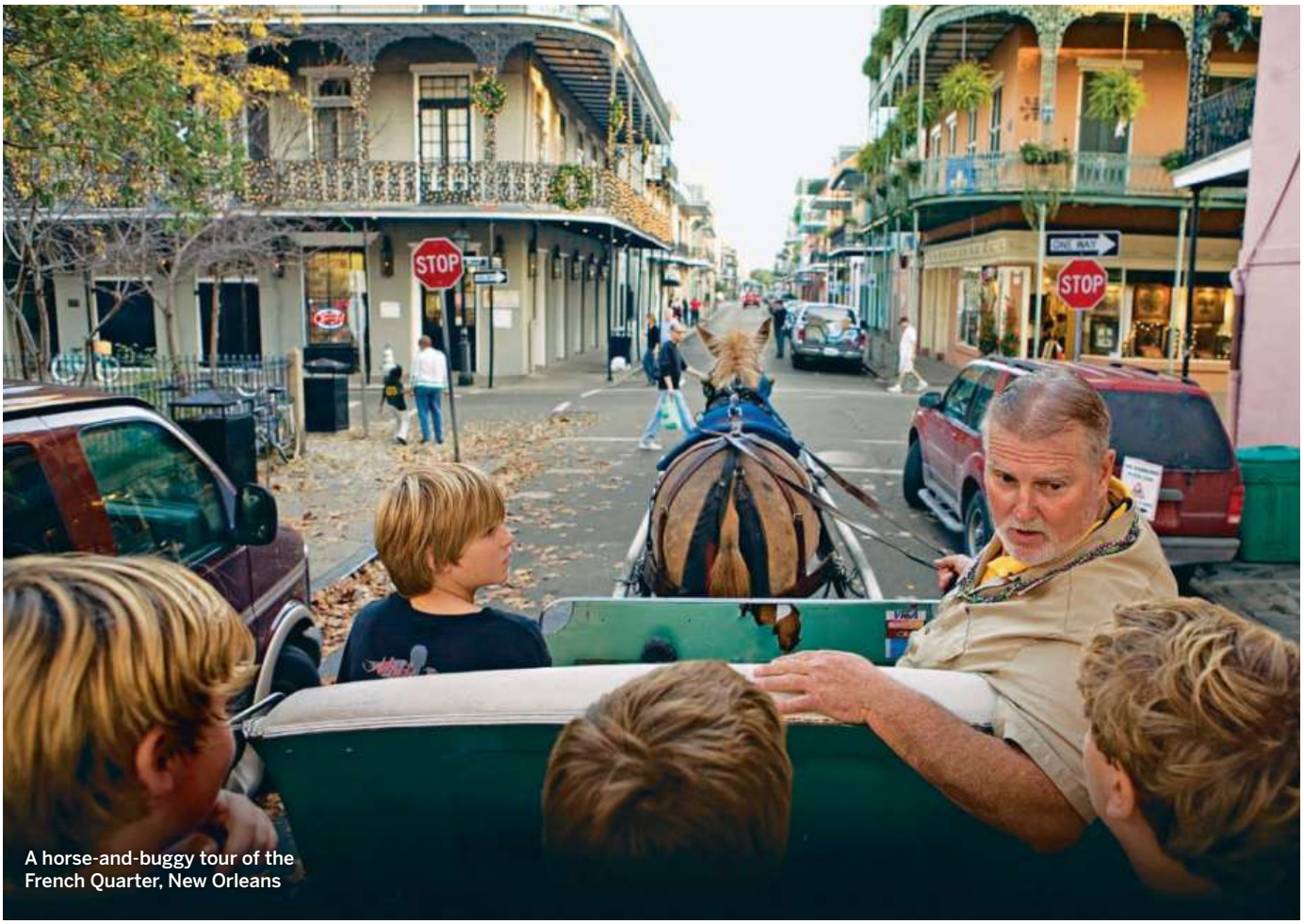
Welcome to the Jungle

#MayaMexico with the teens

WHY GO Let the high schoolers channel the spirit of their inner Indiana Jones in Mexico's Maya temple-strewn Yucatán Peninsula, where they can scale mysterious pyramids, bushwhack through jungles, and cool off in freshwater cenote pools the way the ancients did. A week-long road trip connects the Maya dots from the Caribbean to Gulf of Mexico coasts.

THE PLAN From the region's main airport at Cancún, drive inland for two hours to the great ceremonial city of Chichén Itzá. Stay at the adjacent Lodge at Chichén Itzá to stage an early morning visit, when the popular site is most mystically quiet. Get a living lesson in sophisticated Maya astronomy by counting the 365 steps ascending the nearly ten-storey-tall El Castillo. Imagine real-life *Hunger Games* at the elaborately carved ball court, where competitions ended in human sacrifice.

PAT CANOVA/GETTY IMAGES



A horse-and-buggy tour of the French Quarter, New Orleans

TYRONE TURNER/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CREATIVE

En route to Mérida, another 128 kilometres west, detour to Izamal, where the Spanish colonial buildings are painted a bright egg-yolk yellow. Race to the top of the town's Kinich Kakmo pyramid.

Comb the lost city of Dzibilchaltún, about 16 kilometres north of Mérida, an archaeological site dating to 300 B.C. that features a central plaza, amphitheatre, temple, and—swimsuit alert—the freshwater Cenote Xlakah.

Safari-break some 96 kilometres west at coastal Celestún to spy rosy flocks of mating flamingos. Time your next Maya conquest, eighth-century Uxmal, 80 kilometres south of Mérida, to arrive after dark for the dramatic sound-and-light show. After a night at Hacienda Uxmal, return to the site to Instagram the elaborately carved gods, including mighty Chaac, god of rain, wearing a serpent's mask, and a throne featuring a two-headed jaguar.

Swing back east to Cobá, sight of Yucatán's tallest temple, 138-foot Nohoch Mul, providing a high-priest's view over the jungle canopy.

DON'T MISS Cool off with a dip in the waters of the Gran Cenote on the drive back to the Maya's most beautifully sited ruins, seaside Tulum, just 128 kilometres away, but epochs apart from where you started in the chaotic city of Cancún.
—Elaine Glusac

NEW ORLEANS, U.S.A.

American Express

Play date with a favourite uncle

WHY GO Bourbon Street may be restricted to 21 years and older, but an indulgent uncle (or aunt) seeking to spoil nieces and nephews in New Orleans can find plenty of lively attractions for young people. "The city's very friendly," says 12-year-old Brynn, who can walk to the famed St. Charles Avenue streetcar from her Carrollton neighbourhood home. "There are parks everywhere." And you need only one packed day to get the good times rolling.

THE PLAN Breakfast begins with beignets—the uniquely New Orleans deep-fried pastry topped with powdered sugar—at Café du Monde in the French Quarter's heart. After breakfast troop across Jackson Square, past Andrew Jackson's statue and the fortune-tellers, to the Louisiana State Museum's second floor in the historic Presbytere. Here, discover both bejewelled costumes and the stories behind the city's Mardi Gras festivities at the permanent exhibit "It's Carnival Time in Louisiana."

Next stop: an hour-long tour of the French Quarter conducted by French Quartour Kids, designed for children

up to age 13 by former elementary school teacher and historian Jill Dresser. Hear about pirates, ghosts, and how kids lived in the 1830s. Then visit the New Orleans Insectarium and its bug buffet, serving up mealworm salsa and chocolate chirp cookies made with crickets.

Those not enamoured of six-legged entrées may instead tuck into the fare at District, with a menu of homemade sliders and "extra fancy" doughnuts in exotic flavours like Vietnamese coffee and miso bacon praline. No need to quit munching at the newly opened Southern Food and Beverage Museum, where you can snack while touring the exhibit halls.

Work off the meal with a four-hour kayak tour along the Bayou St. John waterway and spot some of the southern Louisiana wildlife—turtles, egrets, pelicans, and maybe an alligator. If you can't find a representative of *A. mississippiensis* in the wild, the Audubon Zoo features them, as well as the new get-wet attraction, "Lazy River Gator Run," where visitors can float in inner tubes past the exhibits.

DON'T MISS John Besh's Pizza Domenica on Magazine Street features gourmet pizzas and garlic-bread knots with a dipping sauce of melted aged provolone. End your day with a traditional New Orleans snowball at Hansen's. The fluffy mound of shaved ice (never crushed) is flavoured with homemade syrups. Locals adore the cool treats. And so did the James Beard Foundation, which named Hansen's one of "America's Classic" restaurants in 2014.
—Andrew Nelson

HIMACHAL PRADESH, INDIA

Trail Mix

Family hikes through pristine forests, plus fruit-picking

WHY GO Children of all ages will love the bracing mountain air, time in the outdoors, and the novelty of experiencing (in a small way) where food comes from. This 12-day trip, half of which is powered on foot, can open their eyes to relishing a life without climate-control, TVs, and iPads.

THE PLAN From Chandigarh, make the nine-hour-long road journey to Gushaini in the Tirthan Valley and stay a few days near the river. Adults and kids can learn to fish for Himalayan trout while obeying the catch-and-release policy. Also on the cards are short day hikes to nearby hilltops, temples, or a waterfall. On all the trails the kids will delight in picking delicious wild strawberries and wild yellow raspberries.



Next up is a planned five-day trek into the adjacent Great Himalayan National Park. Treks to Marahni, Nada Thach or Dhel allow spectacular vistas and exploring Himalayan villages and the park's wildlife. Himalayan Ecotourism can make all the arrangements along with guides. Post-trek recoup for a day in Gushaini, then make the long drive over the Jalori Pass to Kotgarh. Plan a few days either in apple paradise Kotgarh, or peach haven Rajgarh further down in Himachal's Sirmour district. During harvest season, the trees around Kotgarh and Rajgarh are heavy with fruit. The entire area from Gushaini to Kotgarh is also cherry country and kids will love climbing trees with a basket, to pick the luscious fruits during the months of May and June. This trip is about little joys: watching mynas wash themselves in pools left behind by a rain shower, following butterflies and bees as they flit from one exotic flower to the next, trails through pine and deodar forests, and the roaring Tirthan River.

DON'T MISS Peach, plum, apricot, apple and other orchards bursting with fruity goodness. Squeeze in a trip to Renuka Lake and (in season) the Bhuira jam factory near Rajgarh, if you are in the area. Even reluctant kids will quickly learn to enjoy spotting colourful birds that thrive in this part of Himachal Pradesh.
—Niloufer Venkatraman



Pick wild strawberries and raspberries on trails in the Tirthan Valley.

ANDRÉ MORRRIS

5 COOL PLACES TO SLEEP

GLASS IGLOOS
Kakslauttanen Arctic Resort, Finland No night-lights or tech toys required: Kids lie in bed and watch the aurora borealis (mid-August through April) overhead. Igloos sleep two or four.

CONCRETE TEPEES
Wigwam Villages; Kentucky, Arizona, and California, U.S.A. The last roadside motels remaining of seven built from 1936 to 1949 offer 28-foot-high freestanding tepee rooms and a retro American vibe.

BARONIAL CASTLE
Glennapp, Ballantrae, Scotland Families get the royal treatment at this fairy-tale castle overlooking the Irish Sea, and kids get to try their hand at the ancient sport of falconry.

DRIVE-IN CINEMA ROOM
V8 Hotel-Motorworld Region, Stuttgart, Germany Your crew can pile into an apple-red Cadillac Coupe DeVille bed to watch their favourite flicks on the wall. The driving theme rolls on throughout the Motorworld complex, with its classic Lamborghinis, McLarens, and other vintage sports cars.

AMUSEMENT PARK
Gardaland Hotel, Castelnuovo del Garda, Italy Gardaland amusement park has been delighting children and adults since 1975. Between the park's vertigo-inducing water slides and roller coaster (called Oblivion: The Black Hole, no less) and Gardaland Hotel, which has pirate, magic, and circus-themed rooms, the entire family will be reduced to giggling 8-year-olds.



Plaster body casts of victims killed by the A.D. 79 blowup of Mount Vesuvius are poignantly displayed in Pompeii.

HANS MADEJ/LAIF/REDUX

POMPEII, ITALY

Once Upon a Time in Italy

Ciao time with older teens

WHY GO A deadly volcanic eruption. Gelato. Nudity. And pizza! That's how to sell this four-day southern Italian itinerary to teens. What they'll also get is solid insight into Roman life in A.D. 79. That's when Vesuvius exploded in a superheated cloud of toxic gas and ash, killing some 16,000 people in Pompeii and neighbouring Herculaneum almost instantaneously and preserving their towns in remarkable detail—until the buried cities were discovered some 1,600 years later.

THE PLAN Base yourself in gritty, sprawling Naples, capital of the Campania region and far sassier than the likes of Rome and Milan. The Naples National Archaeological Museum safeguards many of Pompeii's unearthed treasures, including a mosaic of Alexander the Great defeating the Persian King Darius. In the city considered the birthplace of pizza, dine at L'Antica Pizzeria Da Michele. Da Michele still serves only two classic styles of pie: margherita and marinara.

From Naples, take the train to Pompeii Scavi station. Book Pompeii tours online, via the local tourist office, or at your hotel. Choose a guided two-hour tour of the main highlights—from the bathhouses and brothel (you may want to skim the kids past the giggle-inducing naughty murals) to the taverns and launderettes of ancient times. The plaster casts of dogs and people immortalised in their death throes invariably pique the curiosity of kids.

Head to Mount Vesuvius on board the multipurpose four-wheel-drive "Unimog," the only vehicle allowed to the foot of the walking trail. Trek up the steep, dusty path for spectacular views of the smoking crater. Prepare for "it's stinky" comments, prompted by sulphurous gases. If asked "Will it erupt again?" reply that an explosion is long overdue.

DON'T MISS In Naples, head to Il Gelato Mennella (at two locations, Via Carducci and Via Scarlatti), with flavours including pistachio and lemon. —*Maria Pieri*

PARIS, FRANCE

French Connections

European spree for mademoiselle and mom

WHY GO What *jeune fille* (or *fils*, for that matter) wouldn't love a charming weekend in Paris, packed with culture, shopping, and *macarons*?

THE PLAN Shake off jet lag with a guided tour of Paris's major attractions in a vintage convertible Citroën Deux Chevaux, run by a company called 4 roues sous 1 parapluie. Then join the beau monde for afternoon tea at one of the French capital's posh palace hotels such as Le Meurice, centrally located across from the Louvre. It's pricey, but the high tea's tower of finger sandwiches, scones, and petit fours could easily substitute for dinner.

Globe-trotting restaurateur Amy Morton recommends beginning a "monumental" day with Notre Dame Cathedral. Visiting the church's crypt with its Roman ruins "gave my young daughters a real sense of Paris's multilayered history," she says. At the Eiffel Tower, skip the long ticket queues by reserving online ahead of time. Commute between these Seine-side icons by Batobus, the city's ferryboat transit system.

Mona Lisa isn't going anywhere. So why not try one of Paris's insider venues such as the Gaîté Lyrique, a cultural incubator and digital-art exhibition space in a belle époque theatre? Or explore the free Cognacq-Jay Museum, a former aristocrat's mansion with opulent 18th-century decor in the artsy Marais neighbourhood. (The Picasso Museum is practically around the corner.)

The magic word for most Parisians is not Chanel but *soldes* (sales). Outside of France's biannual sales weeks, head to Monoprix (known for its discounted goods) for costume jewellery, scarves, and casual wear; the Opera location, especially, stocks fun, tasteful souvenirs such as Eiffel Tower iPad covers. On the Left Bank, Le Bon Marché (France's Neiman Marcus) carries Louis Vuitton and Dior, a great selection of lingerie and hosiery, and fine chocolate bars in its ground-floor grocery.

DON'T MISS Sign up for a macaron-making class (in English) in the cosy Latin Quarter kitchen of Fred and Amanda Pouillot. Or stop at a Pierre Hermé patisserie: New macaron flavours debut monthly. —*Ceil Miller Bouchet*



A carnival swings into Paris's Tuileries Garden each summer.

KEENPRESS/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CREATIVE

DODECANESE ISLANDS, GREECE

Our Big Fat Greek Sailing

A multigenerational odyssey



A brisk Aegean Sea breeze powers windmills in the Cyclades, Greece.

WHY GO From the windy Cyclades islands to the calmer Ionians, isle hopping in Greece is a great idea for a multigenerational holiday. But avoid the hassles of ferry schedules, flight connections, and multiple hotel bookings by chartering a crewed boat. On the *Calypso (www.calypsoadventure.com),* an elegant sailboat that sleeps ten, captain Dave Sidwell teaches kids to snorkel or spearfish. Or try Incrediblue, a Greek start-up that matches would-be sailors with boat owners. It's basically Airbnb at sea.

THE PLAN The Dodecanese, 12 islands close to the Turkish coast, comprise castles, monasteries, colourful towns, and castaway coves. The regional capital, Rhodes, is most travellers' first port of call. Then set sail for Symi; mansions in every shade of peach line its horseshoe harbour. Panormitis Monastery contains Byzantine and folk art, as well as a collection of bottles retrieved from the sea containing offerings to St. Michael, patron saint of sailors, that will spark the imagination of young seafarers. The monastery operates a wood-fired bakery where you can stock up on fresh bread.

Next stop: Nisyros, a sleepy island with a smouldering volcano at its heart. Dock outside the fishing town of Pali, then clamber up to the sulphurous crater, tiptoeing among hot springs puffing out smoke rings. It's an easy hike for all ages. For white sand, cruise to the uninhabited island of Yiali nearby.

A sanctuary for over a hundred bird species (including rare Eleonora's falcons), Tilos is a throwback to Greece before tourism. The town hall houses Stone Age fossils of dwarf elephants discovered in a nearby cave. In the abandoned 15th-century village of Mikro Chorio, inhabited mostly by goats, a crumbling stone house has been converted into the island's only disco, where teens can dance under the stars. The final port is rugged Astypalaia, known for its windmills, antiquities, and lobster spaghetti. At Vathy, a hidden lagoon, hike over the headland to admire prehistoric rock carvings, then tuck into fried calamari at the only taverna.

DON'T MISS On Kounoupes, two tiny isles connected by a strip of sand, collect natural sea salt by the handful, a savoury memento of your trip. *—Rachel Howard*

SERGIO PITAMITZ/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CREATIVE

JOURNEYS

94 **THAILAND**
A new crop of guesthouses is giving the neighbourhood of Old Bangkok a fresh lease of life

106 **FRANCE**
Lavender fields forever: It looks like Provence and smells like Provence—but it's Drôme Provençale



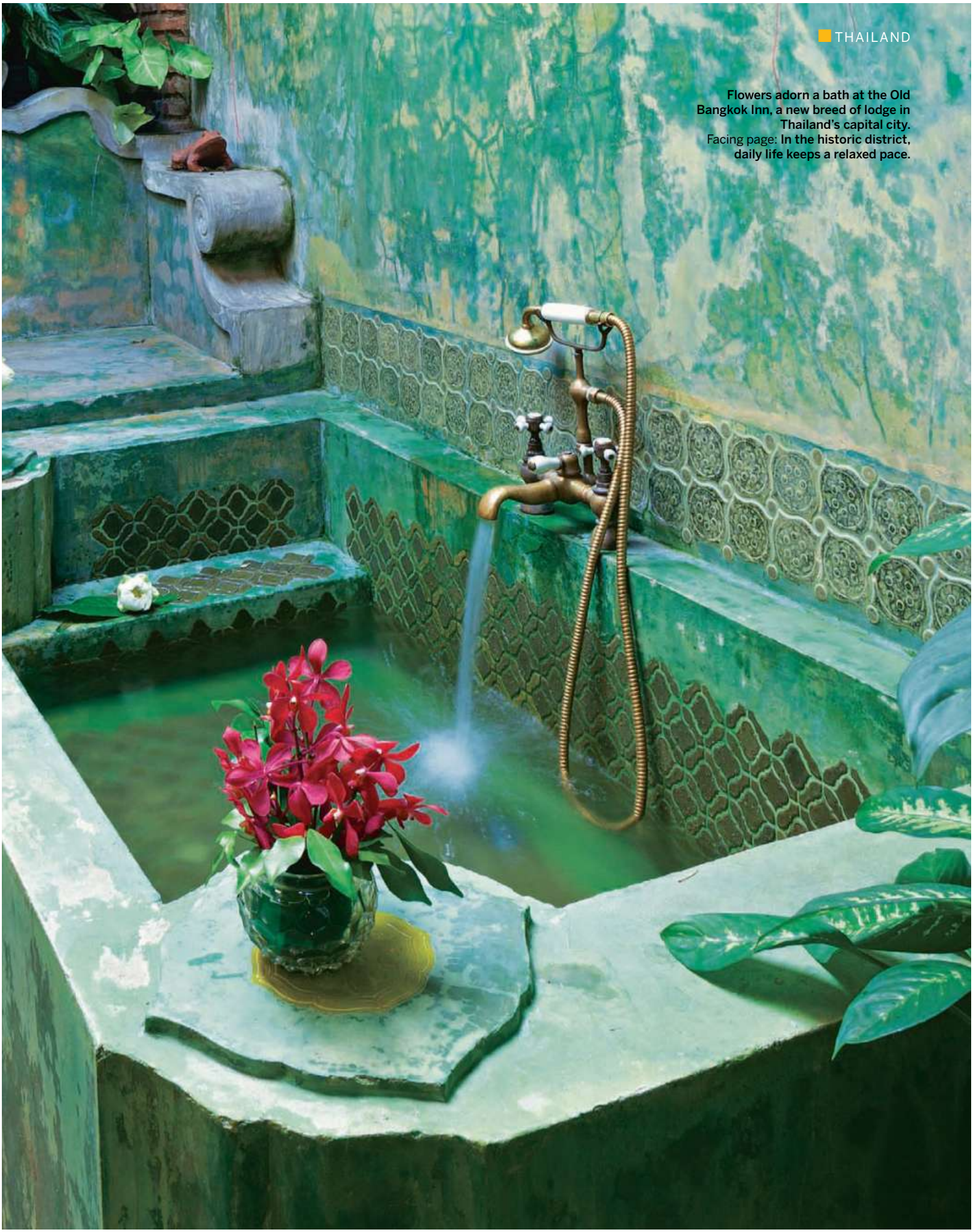
94
Bangkok, Thailand

SUSAN SEUBERT/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CREATIVE/TERRA/CORBIS/IMAGELIBRARY



SAVING OLD BANGKOK

A NEW COAT OF PAINT AND A NEW LEASE ON LIFE FOR RAMSHACKLE BUILDINGS TRANSFORMED INTO GUESTHOUSES



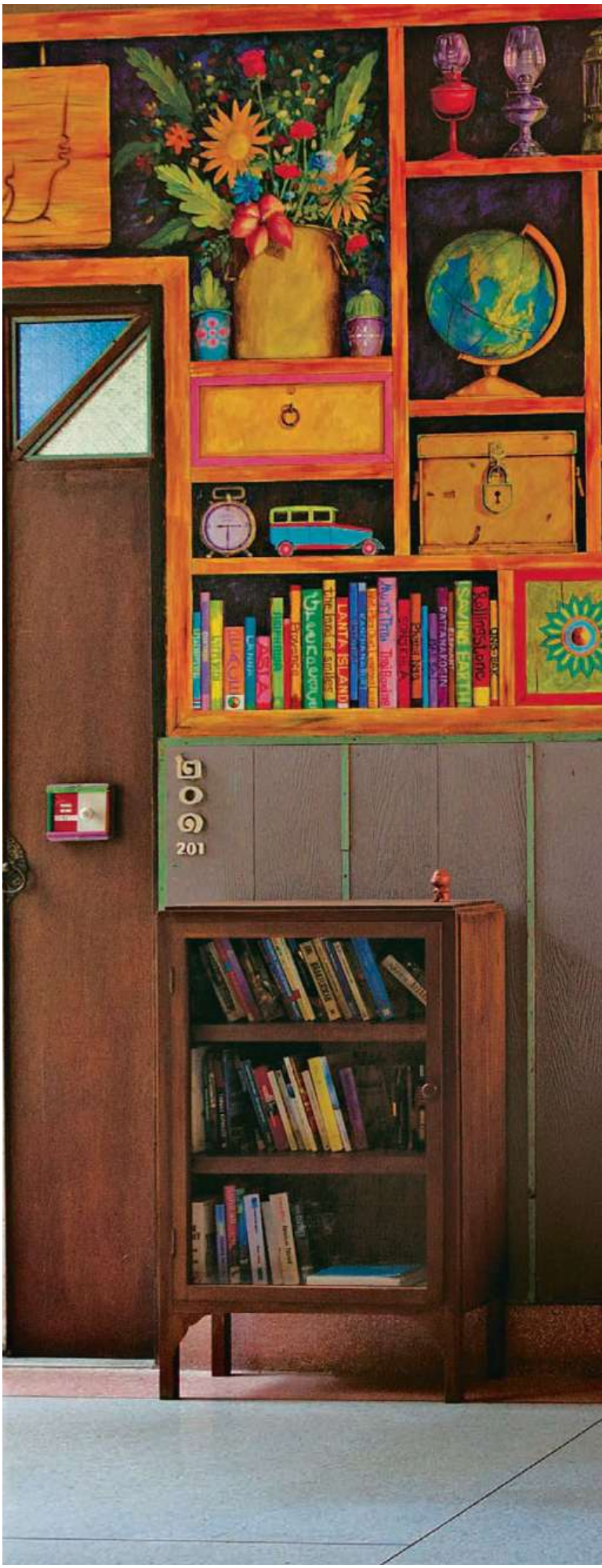
Flowers adorn a bath at the Old Bangkok Inn, a new breed of lodge in Thailand's capital city.
Facing page: **In the historic district, daily life keeps a relaxed pace.**

BY **DAISANN MCLANE**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **SUSAN SEUBERT**

I'M FLOATING THROUGH LIQUID AIR, without a plan, along Samsen Road in Bangkok's old city, a neighbourhood of wooden houses, temples, and royal retreats tucked along the banks of the Chao Phraya River. It is April, the dog days just before rainy season, when Bangkok's metropolitan area transforms into a sauna of ten million inhabitants. The heat is seeping up from the pavement, and trickles of sweat creep down the backs of my knees.





A trompe l'oeil mural (right) **depicting everything from Winnie the Pooh to a map of Thailand sets a whimsical tone at Phranakorn Nornlen, a small vintage guesthouse in Old Bangkok; Wooden filigree and coloured windowpanes brighten a weathered residence** (left) **in one of Old Bangkok's historic neighbourhoods.**


I LOVE KING
I LOVE QUEEN
Thai
Rabbitinthemoon
KHON



Party-coloured festival decorations hang in the Pak Khlong Talad Market, known for its many flower vendors.



Boats cruising the Bangkok Noi canal, one of the waterways that web the city, pass elevated homes.

Just now I'd kill for a blast of air-conditioning, but the shops here offer no refuge; they're old-fashioned two- and three-storey chophouses cooled, sort of, by whirring metal fans. Desperate for a breeze or at least a reasonable imitation of one, I turn toward the river, down a narrow lane called Samsen Soi 5.

That's when I spot the house. It has slatted shutters and a small wooden door, and sits about two feet above street level behind a tangle of trees, vines, and planter pots bursting with palms and philodendrons. Is this an artist's secret Bangkok retreat? Then I notice the wood plaque next to the front door: Samsen 5 Lodge. My heart leaps—at last, a cool guesthouse in the neighbourhood!

Let me explain. For nearly 14 years I've been a repeat visitor to this part of Thailand's capital city, exploring local life in and around Rattanakosin Island, on the eastern bank of the Chao Phraya. This is the original downtown, founded more than 200 years ago; Bangkok's modern centre, with its skyscrapers, vast shopping malls, and congested highways, feels a million miles away. It was in this walkable riverine area of old neighbourhoods tunnelled by spreading banyan trees and sporting melodious-sounding names—Banglamphu, Phra Nakhon, Samsen—that I found a multi-layered community of all Bangkok, from Thai royal family members and courtiers to shopkeepers and artisans.

EVERY TRAVELLER HAS A SPECIAL PLACE, a home away from home. Old Bangkok is mine. But during all these years, one huge element has been missing for me: a memorable place to stay. Oh, the area has no shortage of boxy, thin-walled guesthouses; Bangkok's (in)famous mecca for backpackers, Khao San Road, is a 15-minute walk to the south. For years I stayed in these bare-bones cheapies, consoling myself with the thought that my visits to Bangkok were made all the richer for my not being tempted to linger even one extra second in my room.

Still, I always wondered why no one had recognised that these ramshackle but richly local neighbourhoods were ripe for discovery. Now, it looks as if someone has.

I walk over to the house, stand on tiptoes, and, peeping in the open window, shout in two languages: "Hello! *Sawasdee ka*!"

No one answers. Down the lane, the faint tinkle of bells emanates from a pushcart. I draw closer to the window, peer

inside, and see a tantalising wonderland of Thai thrift market treasures: farm-style wood benches, Chinese chairs, a dusty pair of jade-colour lion figurines, a Victorian clock with hand-painted Chinese characters on the face. The door to one room, ajar, reveals an antique wooden bed with four posts.

I resist the urge to break in and start sleeping; in a few hours I will have to catch my flight home. But for months the mysterious guesthouse lingers in my mind, and not just in a good way. I fret: Does a cool new guesthouse mean the demise of "my" old neighbourhood?

"YOU DIDN'T EAT the scrambled eggs yesterday, so I thought you might like a Thai-style breakfast." Startled, I look up to see Worapan Klampaiboon, Samsen 5 Lodge's owner and host, setting a wooden box on the dining table. Inside it sits a steaming bowl of pork and rice soup. "I picked it up from the street vendor where I buy my meals."

Tall and serious, Worapan is so soft-spoken that sometimes I'm unsure whether I've actually heard him say something or if he has sent me a telepathic message. He also has an uncanny ability to materialise at my elbow when I think it's just me and my coffee.

"What's on your programme for today?" he asks.

Worapan, I discovered when I booked my stay, is an award-winning Thai architect and designer. His firm's office, Super Green Studio, is tucked artfully behind the reception desk. He also is a pioneer of the new guesthouse movement in Old Bangkok. Born and raised in this area, Worapan has made its preservation his mission. Four years ago, he rented this unassuming concrete building across from a Buddhist temple and renovated it into a boutique guesthouse to showcase his ideas about sustainable, locally sourced lodging.

"We're trying to integrate tourism with the community," he tells me as I sip my soup. "This is about people and their lives, not just about saving buildings," he explains, adding that before he started renovating the property, "I went around the street, or *soi*, to let the people know what I was doing. I spoke with my neighbours, with the monks in the nearby temple. I wanted everyone to be comfortable with my guests, and I wanted my guests to feel comfortable on the soi."

He roots around his office and returns with a map that he drew for his guests highlighting neighbours on Samsen Soi 5. Marked are the best street-food stalls, an eccentric coffee shop where patrons share seating with piles of teddy bears, an outdoor Muay Thai gym that offers kickboxing instruction, and the Buddhist temple complex across from the lodge, Wat Si Phraya.

"Most of the visitors who come here want to see Bangkok's big attractions—the Grand Palace, the Emerald Buddha, Wat Arun. And they should see these things that are so important to Thai history and culture. But we want them to see more than tourism sites; we want them to feel the city's life, too."

Soon after Samsen 5 Lodge opened its doors, Worapan began running workshops for young Thai entrepreneurs who wanted to do similar projects.

"Old Bangkok is full of possibilities. There are abandoned schools, warehouses, chophouses, and other public buildings that are in danger of being torn down and could be repurposed into guesthouses and restaurants. We show others how they can renovate," he explains, "and, more important, how they can fit their business, and their guests, into the neighbourhood culture."

His idea has caught fire: Worapan has led ten workshops, all sell-outs. His "graduates," mainly locals in their 30s and 40s, now are seeding small guesthouses in the little side streets and lanes of Old Bangkok. A more cosmopolitan younger generation, says Worapan, sees the potential in the beautiful, sturdy bones of Old Bangkok's buildings.

"The typical people at my conferences are from good Thai families, have travelled abroad, and been exposed to boutique hotels on their trips. They are creative, and their eyes are open to possibilities."

I'm about to ask him to write down the addresses of guesthouses founded by his workshop students, but he anticipates me: "I've called some owners already; they're waiting to show you their places. I've got some errands to run in the same area; why don't we go together?"

The only clue we're nearing a place where foreign travellers may be staying is an antiques shop on the corner of Feung Nakorn Road that has a hand-lettered sign in English: COFFEE.

"I think this is the right lane," Worapan says hesitantly. Though we're only a 20-minute walk from his place, we're on the "other" side of Old Bangkok, just south of the busy boulevard called Ratchadamnoen Klang. Bangkok's lanes are such self-contained worlds that moving from one to another feels almost as if you've changed cities.

Worapan pulls out his cellphone to call ahead, and we continue down the dusty, unremarkable lane. Thanyaporn Piamwiriyakun ("call me Benz"), a pretty woman in her early 30s, spots us and gestures us toward the tall gate of the Feung Nakorn Balcony guesthouse. The gate opens to reveal a lush, hidden park. Vermilion- and white-spotted koi float in a pond surrounded by a teakwood deck and lounge chairs. A four-storey building with balconies and catwalks wraps around the garden.

STANDING BY THE KOI POND, LISTENING TO THE BIRDSONG IN THE TREES, I IMAGINE MYSELF IN THE QUIETER, GENTLER BANGKOK OF THE 1950s

"Can you tell what this building used to be?" Benz asks me. An apartment building, I guess? A motel?

"An elementary school!" she says, laughing.

Worapan the architect chimes in: "Adaptive reuse."

"My parents own the property, and my father wanted to turn it into a parking lot," Benz continues. "I begged them to let me try turning it into a small hotel." They agreed, but assumed she wanted to construct the kind of revenue-generating box that has been the reliable template for budget Bangkok guesthouses. Benz, however, a traveller with an eye for design, had taken Worapan's course and had other ideas.

"My parents are very conservative; they didn't understand why I was spending money and hiring an interior designer and an architect. I had to fight with them a lot. I also cried a lot."

Through the tears, Benz started transforming the old school. Classrooms became sweetly appointed guest rooms, each painted in a warm pastel-and-white colour scheme and furnished with white wooden beds and chairs, and large windows that look out to the pond or to dark green mango trees in the yard. A night's stay in a balcony room here is a bit pricier than at a Khao



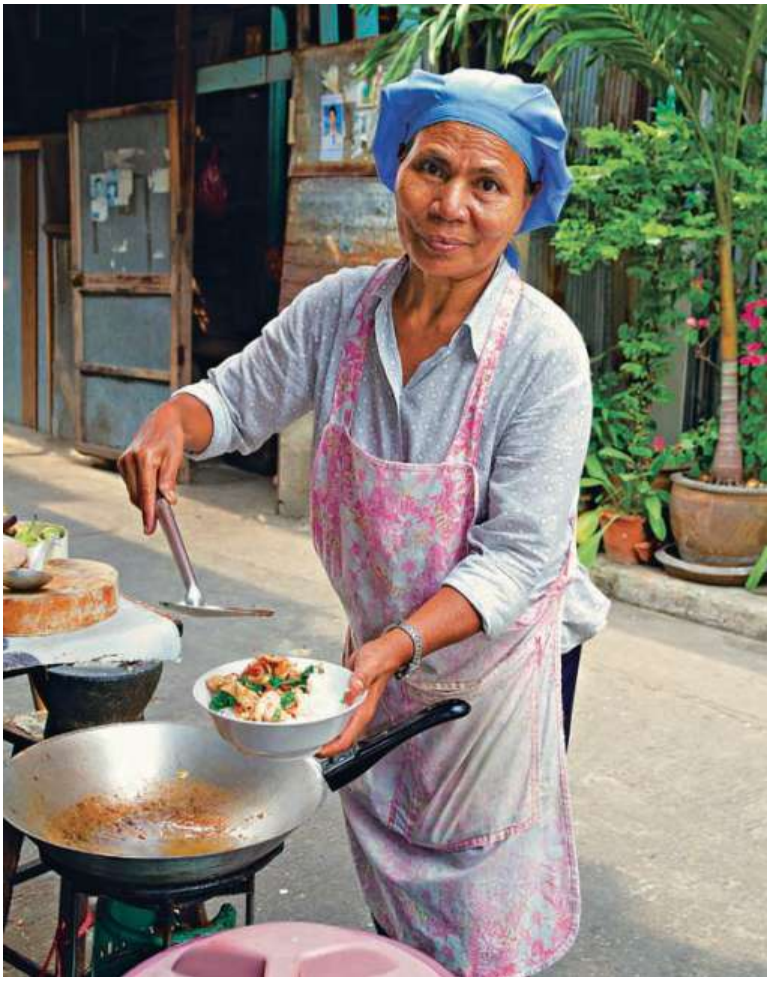


An orange-robed Buddhist monk (top) **collects alms at the Thewet Market, where shops specialise in gardening supplies; Briefly idle, an auto rickshaw, or tuk-tuk** (bottom right)**, sits ready to transport passengers through Bangkok's bustling traffic; Young members of Thailand's National Scout Organization** (bottom left)**, their khaki uniforms spruced up with yellow neckerchiefs, pause on their way home.**









Symbols of enlightenment, 37 metal spires (top left) **on the Buddhist Wat Ratchanatdaram temple inspired its nickname, "iron monastery"; Two men** (top right) **tuck into noodles at a streetside eatery; Rooms at the Baan Dinso guesthouse** (bottom right) **look out on typical local dwellings, many topped with metal roofs; A woman** (bottom left) **dishes up chicken curry over rice at her sidewalk kitchen. "Homelife seems to just spill out onto the narrow alleys in Old Bangkok," says photographer Susan Seubert.**



San Road guesthouse but still well in the budget range. Standing by the koi pond, listening to the birdsong in the trees, I imagine myself in the quieter, gentler Bangkok of the 1950s. As they say, it's all about location: The sois in Old Bangkok have a natural grace, an effortless atmosphere that a new luxury hotel struggles to achieve.

"THERE ARE 96 WOODEN HOUSES just like this in the area, but this is the one my family fell in love with."

Nidhi Akkaravivat sweeps his arm toward the two-storey 1920s teakwood house—"in the colonial style"—that he has turned into a successful B&B called Baan Dinso. I've made my way here on my own; Worapan was busy but kindly drew a back-of-the-envelope map and pointed me in the right direction. It's been a wonderful walk. I passed a tiny restaurant that caught me with its aroma of roast duck, and a row of stores selling foodstuffs, teas, and medicines wrapped in yellow cellophane that Thai people give to monks to "make merit." I browsed stores selling the powdery, jasmine-scented balls that older Thai women use for fragrance. A stroll of about 20 minutes took me 40.

I remove my shoes, Thai style, and stroll across the cool, polished wooden floor of Baan Dinso's foyer as Nidhi signals for a staff person to bring me some water.

"The house was in a sad condition," he says. "The owners decided to move to the suburbs because they couldn't fit their car down this narrow lane. At first we were obsessed by the beauty of it. We thought we would purchase the place for my parents to retire in."

I PASS A TINY RESTAURANT WITH AN AROMA OF ROAST DUCK, AND STORES SELLING POWDERY, JASMINE-SCENTED BALLS WOMEN USE FOR FRAGRANCE. A WALK OF 20 MINUTES TAKES ME 40

Then an even better idea came to Nidhi, who had noticed boutique guesthouses popping up in the area. Why not have the house pay for itself by starting a small business in it? Baan Dinso echoes the small hotels and pensions in Europe; wood platform beds, white linen, bathrooms down the hall. The hotel, which opened in 2006, has won awards from the Association of Siamese Architects for its restoration and become a hit with European visitors—so popular that in 2013, Nidhi opened a second Baan Dinso a few blocks away.

"We are small, only nine rooms, so we can get to know our guests and help them plan their activities," he tells me. "Many guests are surprised to find they don't need a plan because so many interesting places to eat and explore are right here. We had a Swiss guest, a lady. She spent three or four days with us, just wandering the neighbourhood and getting lost. She never made it to the Grand Palace."

"WOULD YOU MIND eating breakfast twice?" Worapan, again, catches me unawares as I'm slurping down the bowl of congee he left for me. "I'm going up to the Sri Yan area. We can have something to eat, then look at a guesthouse project under construction that my group helped design."

I put down my spoon, grab my sunglasses, and we head out to catch a bus. I thought I knew Samsen Road, but this morning I see it through Worapan's eyes, the eyes of an architect and native son. He points out one building after another, shaking his head with dismay.

"That row of chophouses will be gone soon. A developer with several big hotels on Khao San Road is going to put up a big box, probably 80 rooms. And that 1960s building with the detail that looks like a concrete grille? It is also slated for demolition."

In other words, development is slowly creeping out of the Khao San Road area and insinuating its way into Old Bangkok. The bus whisks us 15 blocks north, to the part of Samsen where most English signs disappear and no foreigners wander the streets.

"I grew up right around here," Worapan says, smiling now. He points out some area landmarks, such as his high school, St. Gabriel's College, and the sleek modernist building that houses the state-run Bank of Thailand—a formidable walled and gated fortress manned by a guard. "It's on the grounds of one of the royal palaces," Worapan adds.

Ten minutes later, we are lost in the sois of Sri Yan, where Worapan still lives on a Thai-style compound with his mother and brother.

"Sri Yan is famous around Bangkok for its market and street food," he says, and makes a beeline to his childhood favourite. "This is Look Chin Sri Yan. I have been coming here with my family more than 30 years. When my father was alive, the owner wouldn't ever let us pay."

As we delve into *sen mee*—needle-slender noodles made of rice—and peppery meatballs, he explains why: His father was an official of Thailand's Crown Property Bureau, the agency charged with managing and collecting rents on all of the royal family's property. In Bangkok, their holdings amount to a majority of the land.

"My father made sure the owner of the beef-ball shop didn't lose his lease, or have his rent rise too much, so he could remain in business a long time."

I suddenly understand why so many of these riverside Bangkok neighbourhoods feel frozen in time, filled with traditional mom-and-pop shops. The slow, conservative hand of royal patronage has controlled the levers of Bangkok's development rather than the go-go pace of Asian property moguls.

A 15-minute walk, a turn down another soi, and a small gate opens. We're at Worapan's consulting project, a rambling old two-storey house with shutters, upstairs balconies, and a pocket-size garden. I hear a rat-a-tat of hammers.

"They're taking out walls so they can put in nine rooms and more bathrooms," says Worapan. Tucked neatly into its lane, this future home base for travellers from England and Japan, the United States and Sweden, folds completely into the life of its soi. So, Worapan hopes, will its guests. I imagine them venturing out from the guesthouse to discover their own favourite vendors, beef-ball noodles, and Thai treasures. And perhaps eventually, like me, they will find a home on their own Bangkok soi that calls them back again and again.

DAISANN McLANE divides her time between New York and Hong Kong, and runs the tour company Little Adventures. Contributing photographer **SUSAN SEUBERT** alleviated Bangkok's humid heat with a local favourite: freshly squeezed pomegranate juice.



Besides fake designer goods, Bangkok is a city of endless markets and malls where shoppers can pick up traditional Thai silk, jewellery, and batik gifts and souvenirs.

THE GUIDE



Orientation

Bangkok is Thailand's capital and its most populous city. It is located on the Chao Phraya River, 40 km north of the Gulf of Thailand. The capital city—locals refer to as Krung Thep—is at its most evocative in the narrow lanes and streets of Old Bangkok. Here, a renaissance of small, owner-restored guesthouses is making it easy for visitors to experience the rich culture of everyday Thai life.

Getting There

There are frequent direct flights to Bangkok from major Indian cities and the flying time is between 2.5 hours (from Kolkata) to 4.5 hours (from Mumbai/Delhi).

Visa

Indian visitors to Thailand require a tourist visa. A 30-day single entry visa costs ₹2,000, payable via cash or demand draft. Details of documents required are available at *www.vfs-thailand.co.in.*

Stay

Samsen 5 Lodge offers three rooms, all en suite *(+66-89-6969896; www.samsen5lodgebangkok.com; doubles from 1,200 baht/₹2,195)*. High ceilings and teak floors mark **Baan Dinso guesthouse's** nine rooms *(+66-86-8153300; www.baandinso.com; doubles from 1,400 baht/₹2,560)*. Guests at the **SSIP Boutique Dhevej Bangkok**, a new 20-room boutique hotel founded by a descendant of Thai royalty, sleep in four-poster beds; amenities include Thann aromatherapy toiletries—and a fortune-teller *(+66-2-2821899; www.ssiphotelthailand.com; doubles from 2,100 baht/₹3,840)*. **Phranakorn Nornlen**'s 30 guest rooms occupy a former hotel close to Thewet Market and the river; quirky touches include an antiques exhibit and workshops in bookbinding *(+66-2-6288188; www.phranakorn-nornlen.com; 2,450 baht/₹4,480)*. **Feung Nakorn Balcony**, a 38-room hotel built around a quiet courtyard, has something for everyone, suites to dorm beds *(+66-2-6221100; www.feungnakorn.com; doubles from 1,700 baht/₹3,100)*. Thai antiques and textiles distinguish the ten floral-themed guest rooms at the **Old Bangkok Inn**, a luxe option in Old Bangkok. The inn's gracious owners are descendants of an old princely Thai family *(+66-2-6291787; www.oldbangkokinn.com; doubles from 3,190 baht/₹5,833).*

Eat

It's Bangkok, so we're talking street food. Walk down **Soi 2** and **Soi 4**, just off Samsen Road, and you'll find a feast of regional Thai fare, especially Isan cuisine, known for its meat salads and sticky rice. On **Samsen Soi 4**, watch the vendor pummel the papaya for your *som tum* in a mortar while you wait for your barbecue fish from the lady on the other side of the street. Feeling adventurous? Hop on a bus going north and get off at **Nakhon Chaisi Road**, in the Sri Yan neighbourhood, to graze from an array of food carts and popular noodle shops (Worapan Klampaiboon's fave, **Look Chin Sri Yan**, is just one of many famous eateries here). **Phra Artit** and **Phra Sumen Roads** remain the "restaurant row" of Old Bangkok; Try **Hemlock** for a terrific sit-down feast of "ancient Thai cuisine" and **Roti Mataba** for a taste of Thai Muslim breads and curry.

Shopping

Few Indian travellers leave Bangkok without shopping, whether for cheap electronics or local handicrafts. Weekends, visit **Chatuchak Market** for stalls selling everything under the sun. At dusk, head south to **Thieves Market** for great second-hand bargains. Bangkok is famous for its quality fakes. Pick up knock-down designer bags at **MBK Mall** (444 Phayathai Rd), or cheap electronics and phones at **Siam Paragon Mall** (991/1 1st Floor, Rama I Road).

Atlas



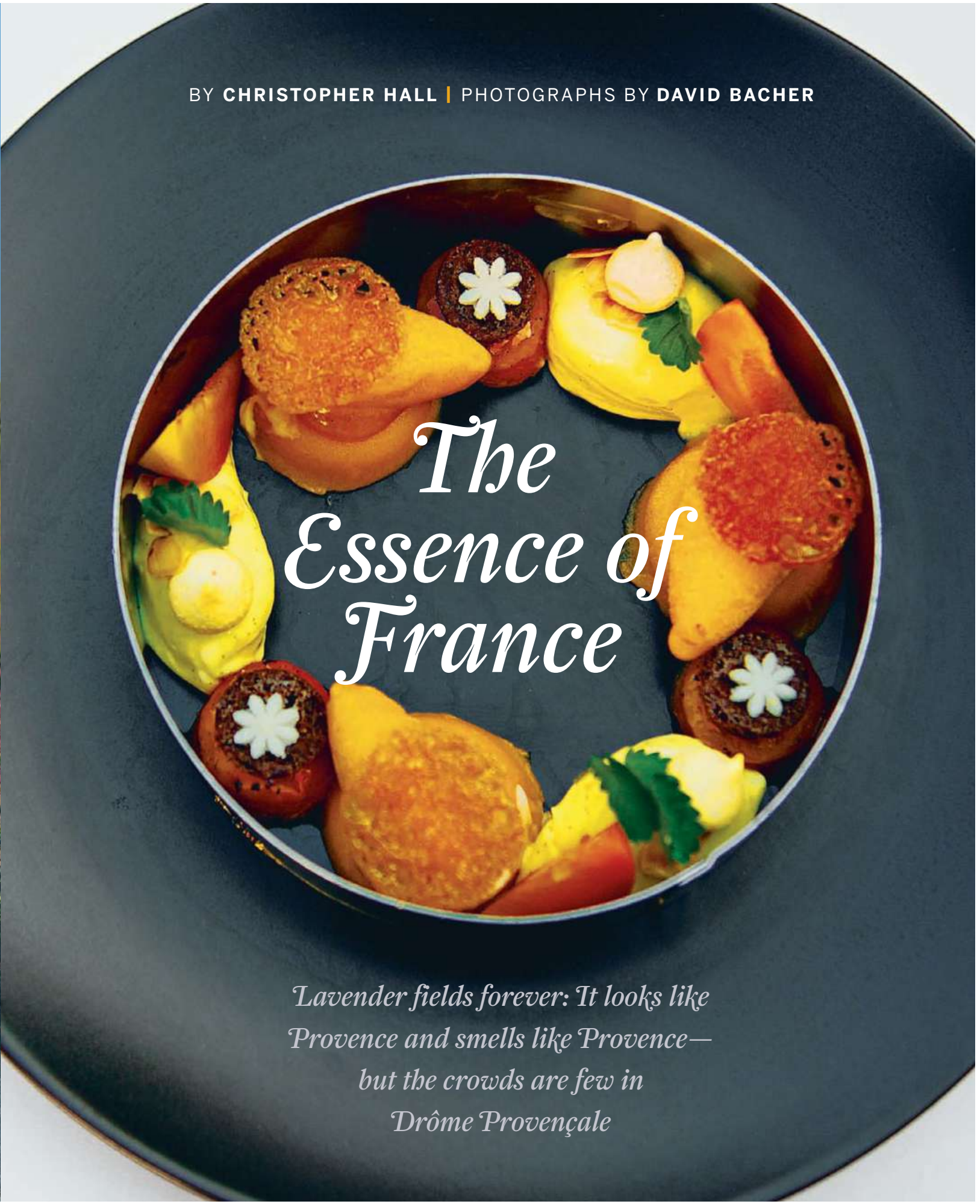
- Bangkok's full name is Krung Thep Mahanakhon Amon Rattanakosin Mahinthara Yuthaya Mahadilok Phop Noppharat Ratchathani Burirom Udomratchaniwet Mahasathan Amon Piman Awatan Sathit Sakkathattiya Witsanukam Prasit.
- The head is sacred in Thai culture, and shouldn't be touched by others.
- The world's largest solid gold Buddha is in Bangkok's Wat Traimit temple.

INTERNATIONAL MAPPING



Odile Tassi runs her farm, L'Essential de Lavande, with a hands-on approach. Facing page: Local apricots sweeten summer desserts.

BY **CHRISTOPHER HALL** | PHOTOGRAPHS BY **DAVID BACHER**



The Essence of France

Lavender fields forever: It looks like Provence and smells like Provence—but the crowds are few in Drôme Provençale

Can a rectangle of card stock compel a journey halfway around the world? As I drive on this bright July afternoon past a blur of vineyards and sunflowers on the Autoroute du Soleil ("motorway of the sun"), I reach for the worn business card in my shirt pocket and ponder its power. The names "M et Mme Maurice Reboul" and their titles (producers and distillers of essential oils) are printed on the image of a lavender field. That's all it took—plus half a decade of pining—to bring me back to France's Drôme Provençale, a swathe of quiet countryside north of Provence proper.

Five years ago, Monsieur Reboul handed me the card while we stood next to a field abloom in lavender. His tanned, angular face—with the ghost of an old scar on one cheek—sweated in the sun of southern France. In the field, a roaring mechanical harvester crept through the plants, shearing them into low, spiky mounds, an army of grey-green porcupines in precise rows marching to the horizon.

I had spotted Reboul while driving through this unassuming pocket of truffle forests, rolling farmland, and ancient hilltop villages. I stopped to ask directions, and we fell into conversation. "I'm 47 years old and have been a farmer and distiller all my life," he told me, going on to explain that in 1947 his grandfather started the distillery that Reboul now runs with his cousin.

I told him how surprised I was to find such a stunning region unscathed by mass tourism, its roads virtually empty of the motorhomes and excursion buses that clog Provence each summer.

"Ah, but Provence is legendary, and we are not," he said, laughing, clearly happy for that. As we spoke, newly harvested lavender—pungent from volatile oils, redolent of flowers and mown hay and crushed eucalyptus leaves—perfumed the air. Reboul shook my hand and said goodbye. Time to get back to work. He handed me his card and walked toward the field.

"If you ever return during the harvest," he called out, "come see the distillery in action."

The warmth of the sun and of Monsieur Reboul, the scent of fresh-cut lavender, a brief 10-minute conversation—that was it. And yet Reboul's card came to embody all of this region for me and the promise, if ever I returned, of getting to know a radiant slice of rural France—*la France profonde*—that remains unhurried, uncrowded, authentic. Over the years I've kept the card on my desk in San Francisco as a kind of talisman, fingering it often, especially on cold, grey days with fog shrouding the city. Maybe it would get me back to that fragrant place where, I imagined, skies are perpetually sunny and all farmers friendly.

IT IS HOT AND CLEAR during my hour-and-a-half drive north from the Marseille airport to Drôme Provençale, where I plan to stay near the town of Grignan. I hop off the high-speed autoroute and immediately slow to the pace of the countryside and its twisting roads, stopping in St. Paul Trois Châteaux for a cool drink in a shaded square. A fountain splashes, a counterpoint to the crescendo of buzzing cicadas. A wedding couple emerge from a darkened cathedral into the piercing afternoon light, slip into a black 1930s Citroën dotted with pink roses, and zoom away. Already it feels as if I've picked up where I left off five years ago.

The weather, however, is another story. On the phone, Monsieur Reboul tells me that tomorrow, Sunday, no one works at the distillery or in the fields, and Monday calls for rain. We make a date for Tuesday, the day before I leave, though he warns that if no lavender has been harvested by then, the distillery won't be running. The reality of a lavender farmer and distiller's life, I realise, is less about postcard views than weather forecasts.

That evening, I head for dinner in Vinsobres, a wine-making village on a hillside above the moss green Eygues River. At a bistro table next to the stone wall of a church, I dig into rich fish soup and a robust Provençale dish of fork-tender veal simmered with tomatoes. Swifts scream overhead in pursuit of flying insects. Trickles of condensation run down bottles of chilled rosé. Strangers at adjacent tables and I compare dishes and joke with the servers.

After dark, I drop into the annual village dinner, dance, and pétanque tournament in tiny Solérieux. The ball game is over and the champion crowned by the time I arrive at 10 p.m., and now the entire village sits together on long planks under the stars, laughing, talking, and finishing their meals. A singer armed with a karaoke machine pumps French pop tunes into the warm night air. A scrum of young kids tears by. A boy no more than six years old peels off and approaches. He shows me a large horned beetle he's caught. "Do you live here?" he suddenly asks.

No, I reply. But I'd like to.

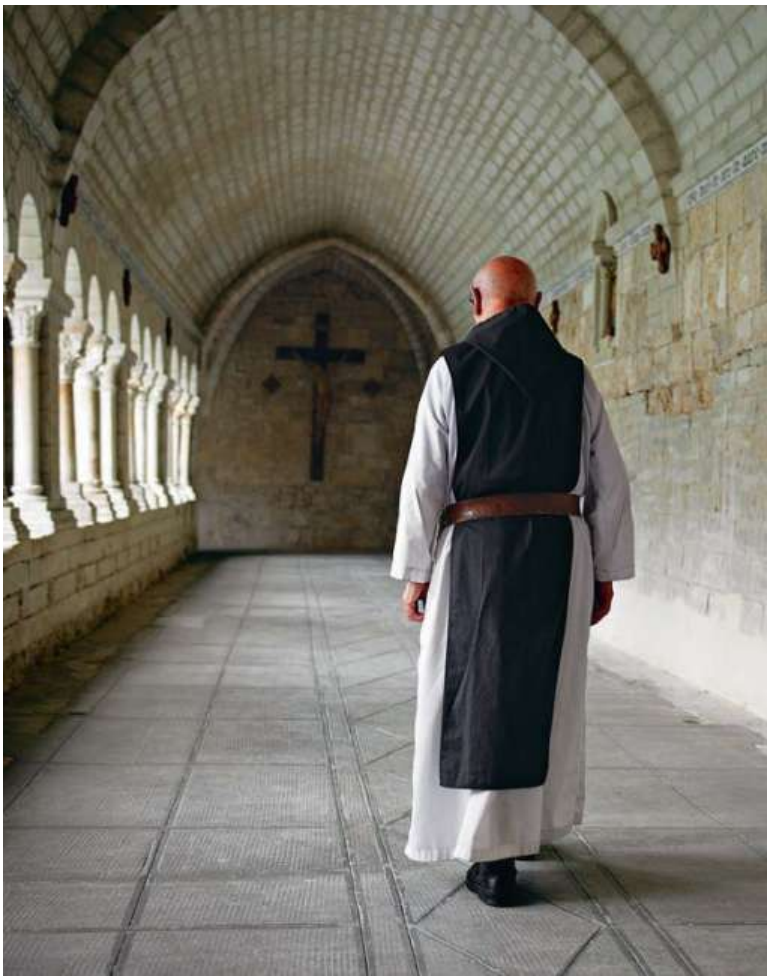
"LAVENDER IS PART of the Drôme landscape but also our French heritage," Odile Tassi tells me the following day when I visit her farm on the plateau of Clansayes. A former marketing executive from Lyon, with sun-streaked blond hair and a brilliant smile, Tassi now grows lavender for her own line of health and beauty products.

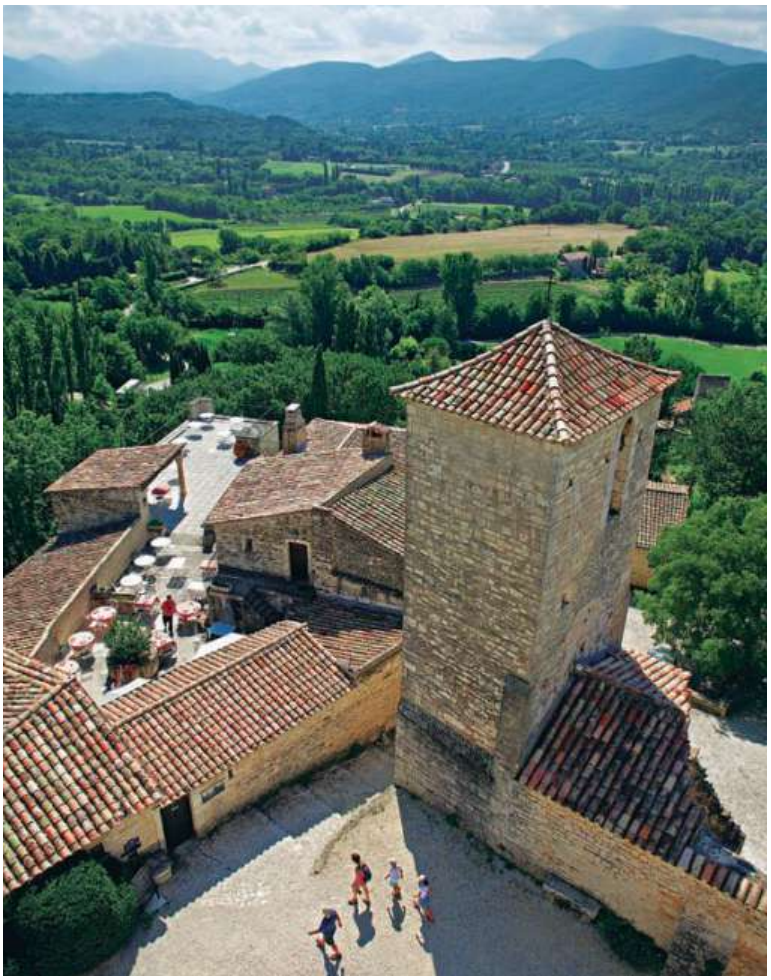
I arrived late for a public tour of Tassi's farm, having lost track of time during a busy day that took in the sprawling outdoor market of Nyons, a picnic and long country walk under increasingly cloudy skies, and a village *vide-grenier* (rummage sale) beneath the medieval walls of Richerenches. Raindrops now spit from the steely sky.

"Obviously, you haven't kept anyone waiting," Tassi says with a laugh when I apologise for being tardy. Though it's the middle of lavender season, a time when similar farms down in Provence swarm with visitors, I'm the only one on the tour. Inside, Tassi tells me to sniff three vials of lavender essential oils and choose which I prefer. The first has a sharp aroma, the second almost no smell. I choose the third, a classic lavender scent.

"That's *lavindin*," Tassi says, nodding, "a natural hybrid of the *lavande fine*, or true lavender, that you first smelled, and the *lavande aspic* that you sampled next." Tassi explains that virtually everyone chooses lavindin, which has been grown commercially since the 1930s and is the dominant lavender crop here.

We walk into her fields. The soil is dry and rocky—perfect for the herb—and in the distance a patchwork of purple and blue







A monk (top left) **paces the Aiguebelle Abbey; Le Poët Laval's medieval castle** (top right) **overlooks the Jabron Valley; Shoppers after baked goods and regional specialities** (bottom right) **keep the Nyons market bustling; Vintage charm** (bottom left) **is a fact of life in Drôme Provençale villages such as Grignan.**



Surrounded by lavender country, Grignan crowns a hilltop in southeastern France. Dating to the 11th century, the fortified village harbours a large Renaissance castle, stone houses, and inns.









At the base of Grignan's castle, Le Clair de la Plume hotel and restaurant welcomes guests with dining *en plein air* (top) **and other Provençal comforts** (bottom left) **befitting its setting in lavender country** (bottom right)**.**





Truffle producer Gilles Aymes enlists his trained yellow Labradors to sniff out the buried treasure in an oak grove at the Domaine de Bramarel estate outside Grignan.

fields alternates with squares of golden wheat and lush vineyards. I rhapsodise about the scenery, but Tassi talks rainfall, yield, and agricultural pests. She is farmer through and through.

Tassi suggests I try the terrace of a nearby bistro for dinner and it's there, between bites of artichoke hearts in vinaigrette and velvety foie gras on toast, that the skies fully let loose. Rain lashes the terrace as diners and waiters grab dishes and flee inside. It storms all night and continues to rain throughout the following day, when a low fog renders the lavender fields gauzy and grey. This is not the sun-splashed land I imagined but one of hushed beauty. Even the cicadas have fallen silent.

FINALLY, THE DAY BEFORE I leave the area, the sun returns, creating steam on the still damp road as I drive to Domaine de Bramarel, an estate outside Grignan. There I join *truffiCulteur* Gilles Aymes, his two yellow Labradors, Ebel and Aria, and a handful of visitors for a lesson on growing and hunting truffles.

"Truffles were totally wild until around 1850 when people, including my great-grandfather, figured out how to promote their growth around oaks and other trees," says Aymes, a silver-haired man who speaks with a pronounced Provençal twang. "And though people associate French truffles with Perigord, more are produced in Drôme Provençale than anywhere else in France." Even with coveted truffles, I marvel to myself, this region flies below the radar.

We follow Aymes into an oak grove, where the dogs, who have been trained from the age of nine weeks to love the taste and smell of truffles, immediately paw the ground. Afterward, during a tasting, I give in to their imploring eyes and can't help but sneak them a nibble.

Late in the day, I finally drive to Maurice Reboul's distillery, located on a narrow lane near Montségur sur Lauzon. Coming around a bend, I spot the workaday metal prefab building. There's no steam venting from the smokestacks.

"The fields are still too wet to harvest," says Reboul after greeting me. He looks exactly as I remember except that his dark hair has gone grey around the temples. "I'm afraid the distillery won't be working until late tomorrow or the next day."

That doesn't matter, I tell him, and in truth it doesn't. In the place that my imagination conjured around his business card, this turn of events would have been a let-down. But in travel, reality is always more interesting than fantasy, even when real life means gully washers, delayed lavender harvests, and non-operational distilleries.

For about an hour, I follow Reboul around the distillery as he points out its workings, a Rube Goldberg assemblage of pipes, valves, and boilers that in one hour can extract oil from flowers. I meet his business manager and wave hello to his cousin. I listen as Reboul describes both the satisfaction of producing highly sought-after essential oils, and—like Odile Tassi—the worries that come with being a farmer. He allows me a glimpse at his life.

Finally, as we're parting ways, I show Monsieur Reboul the card I've been carrying. He shakes his head and smiles, perhaps at the craziness of an American keeping it so long—someone, I'm sure, he has no recollection of ever meeting.

I put the card back in my shirt pocket. Later, I will return it to its spot on my desk. But in truth, I don't need it anymore. The brightness of memory—and the warmth of real connection—outshine even this cherished keepsake. ●

Christopher Hall is a regular contributor to to *National Geographic Traveler* (U.S.). Born in Virginia, photographer **David Bacher** now lives near Paris.

THE GUIDE

Orientation

La Drôme is a region in the south of France. Its southern section is known as La Drôme Provençale for the similarities it shares with the popular Provence area that it neighbours. Grignan, one of its popular villages, is 159 km/2 hr northwest of the nearest big city Marseille. The Domaine de Bramarel truffle estate is just outside Grignan. The lavender farm L'Essentiel de Lavande in Clansayes is 18 km/20 min southwest of Grignan. Maurice Reboul's distillery in Montségur sur Lauzon is 10 km/15 min south of Grignan. Nyons is 24 km/ 30 min west of Grignan.



Getting There

From India, there are direct flights to Paris but not Marseille. From Paris you can get to Montélimar in La Drôme, in 2 hr 12 min on the TGV *(3 hr/₹7,000)*, and then take a bus to Grignan 30 km/30 min away *(bus every 4 hours; ₹140)*. One-stop connections from India to Marseille are available with brief halts at a European city like Frankfurt or Amsterdam, depending on the airline chosen. Grignan is 159 km/2 hr northwest of Marseille from where you can take a train to Montélimar *(3hr 20 min/approx. ₹2,000 one-way)* and then the bus. Renting a car is probably the best way to get around La Drôme. A car can be rented at Marseille airport or other locations in France *(www.marseille-airport.com)*.



Visa

Indian travellers to France require a Schengen visa. A short-stay tourist visa costs about ₹4,255 and requires confirmed return flight tickets and other documents. The processing time is 15 working days. For a complete list of documents and addresses of the visa centres visit *www.vfs-france.co.in*

Eat

Provençal comfort food such as garlicky *soupe de poisson* (fish soup) and eggplant gratin shine at homey **L'Auberge du Petit Bistrot**, whose tables spill into an adjoining square in the tiny hilltop village of Vinsobres.

At St. Restitut's **Bistrot Sidoine**, the changing chalkboard menu of small plates may include a soufflé-like *moelleux* of leeks and local Picodon goat cheese. The outdoor terrace draws a crowd during warmer months.

The elegant modern interior of **Restaurant O'Rabasse** in Richerenches sets the scene for inventive seasonal dishes like sautéed prawns with foamy langoustine sauce and chilled apricot soup. The wine list features hard-to-find Rhône vintages.

Inside the stone walls of Le Poët Laval, a medieval village, **Les Hospitaliers** serves up pork loin with a rich mushroom sauce, a frozen cassis parfait, and other classic French fare. The restaurant is part of a 22-room hotel with pool.

Stay

Bordered by wheat and lavender fields outside the hamlet of Colonzelle, **La Moutière** has three B&B rooms and five self-catering apartments in renovated 18th-century stone buildings originally used in silk production. A large swimming pool lies at one end of the four-acre grounds, and guests can take the inn's bicycles into the countryside *(+33-475-462688; www.lamoutiere.com; doubles from €130/₹9,171)*. Decorated in an airy, French-country style, the 16 rooms and suites of **Le Clair de la Plume** occupy two old houses and a walled garden in the village of Grignan. A stone swimming pond makes a cool refuge on summer days, while the hotel's highly regarded restaurant offers a truffle tasting menu *(+33-475-918130; www.clairplume.com/grignan/en; doubles from €99/₹6,980)*

INTERNATIONAL MAPPING



Lavender 101

The lavender harvest in the Drôme Provençale section of the Rhône-Alpes region rivals that of the more famous—and crowded—fields of Luberon in Provence to the south. Harvest dates vary, generally beginning at lower elevations around Grignan and Valréas in late June and continuing into August in the highlands to the north and east.

Though Maurice Reboul's distillery, named after his grandfather Raoul Duffez, is not typically open for tours, visitors can get immersed in the lavender experience at **L'Essentiel de Lavande**, a small farm outside Clansayes. Meet owner Odile Tassi, tour the fields, take a smell test of essential oils, observe distillation through a miniature transparent still, and enjoy a facial or massage under oak trees. *(essentiel-de-lavande.com/en; 45-min distilling tour €2.50/₹180 Jul-Aug; 1.5-hr domain tour and massage €68/₹5,000 July-Sep.)*

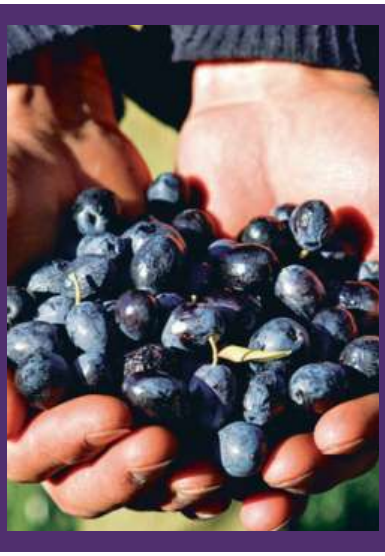
During lavender season, **Distillerie Bleu Provence** in Nyons offers guided visits of its working distillery as well as soap- and perfume-making workshops *(distillerie-bleu-provence.com)*.



Atlas

- Over 350 crocodiles live at La **Ferme aux Crocodiles**, a research facility and Drôme Provençale's number one tourist attraction.
- Drôme Provençale is home to three of the 157 officially designated most beautiful villages of France: **La Garde Adhémar**, **Le Poët Laval**, and **Montbrun les Bains**.
- At the Truffle Mass each January in **Richerenches**, congregants fill baskets with black truffles that are then auctioned.

Not only is Nyons famous for its lavender fields, it is also known for producing one of France's best olives and extra-virgin olive oils. Dark Tanche olives are harvested in December, after their skin has begun to shrivel.



LOCAL FLAVOUR

OLIVE AFFAIR

Nyons olives became the first olives in France to earn their own AOC, a legal certification of geographic origin and quality awarded to unique agricultural products. The violet-black Tanche variety grown here produces fruit as well as extra virgin oil characterised by a remarkably rich, fruity taste and little to no bitterness. Sample cured olives and oil at the vast markets in central Nyons on Thursdays and, in summer, Sundays.

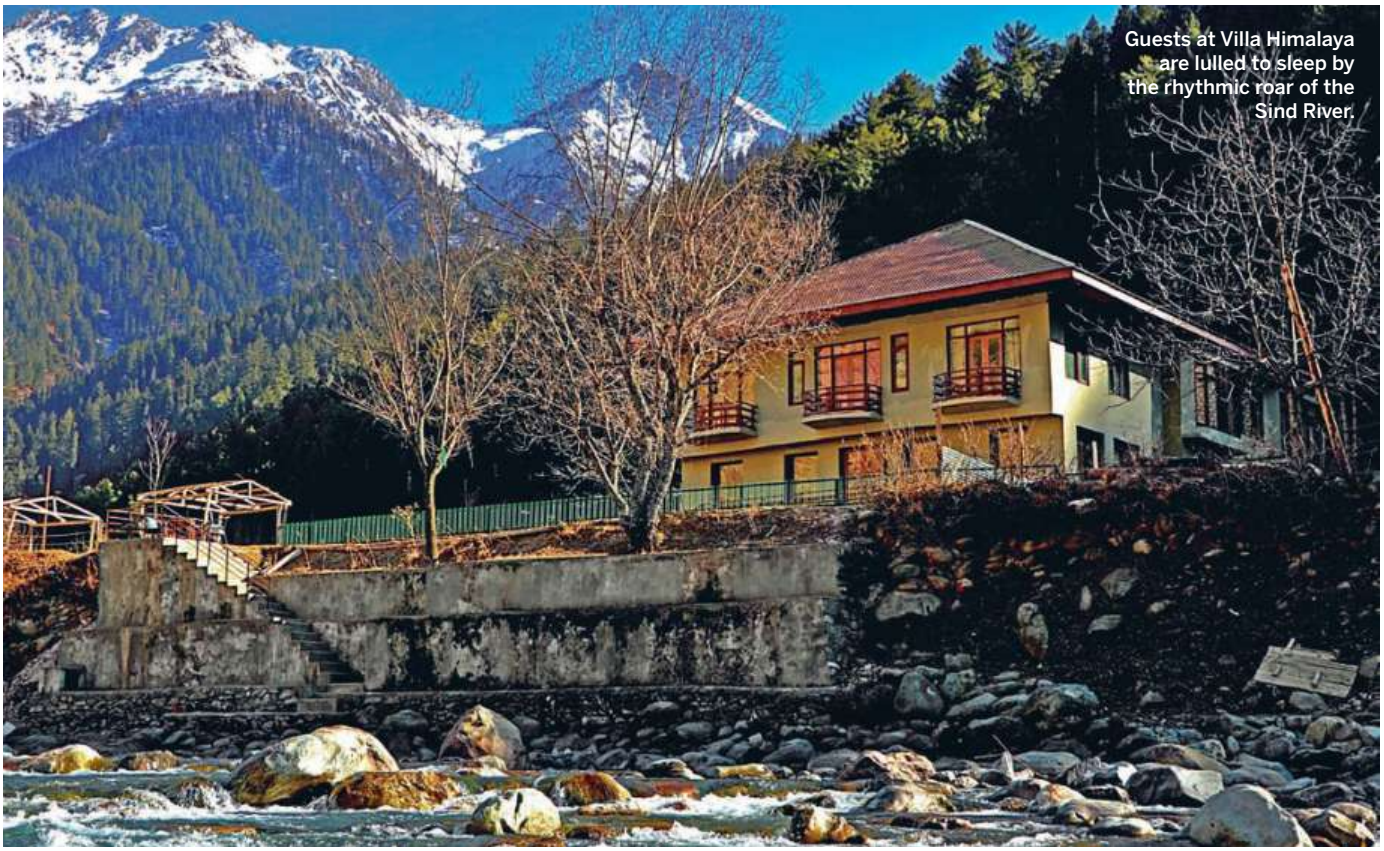
HEMIS/INDIAPICTURE (WOMAN), L.PASCALE/LA DRÔME TOURISME (OLIVES), MOIRENC CAMILLE/HEMIS/CORBIS/IMAGELIBRARY (LAVENDER)

SHORT BREAKS

118 **STAY: SIMPLE LIFE**
Uran: A quick, fuss-free getaway from high-octane Mumbai

119 **STAY: LUXURY GETAWAY**
Ocean views from a traditional tharawad house in Kovalam

120 **STAY: WELLNESS RETREAT**
Slowing down to get ahead at a wellness retreat near Rishikesh



Guests at Villa Himalaya are lulled to sleep by the rhythmic roar of the Sind River.

OFFLINE ADVENTURES

AT THE VILLA HIMALAYA, THE ONLY SIGNAL YOU'LL RECEIVE IS THE CALL OF THE MOUNTAINS WAITING TO BE EXPLORED | BY NEHA SUMITRAN

There are two kinds of silence: the absence of noise and the presence of something so powerful, it mutes out even the most niggling thoughts. Such was the roar of the Sind River, swirling and eddying a few steps from my room at The Villa Himalaya; the more I focused on the thrashing body of water, the calmer I felt. The sun beamed benevolently on the Sind's icy grey waters and through the curtains of mist hanging above pine-draped mountains. On the far bank, mustard fields simmered in the breeze.

The Villa Himalaya makes the most of its riverside location. The boutique resort in the Kashmiri village of Kullan has rooms with large, unblemished glass windows that afford stilling views of Sonamarg Valley. Until May, the mountain vistas are more white than green, but by the time we visited in the end of July, there were only crescents of snow clinging to the upper reaches of the craggy peaks. Days were cool, cloudy, and intermittently sunny, just the sort of light-sweater weather plain-dwellers like me yearn for. I spent most of my time reading under the walnut tree on the lawn dotted with wild blooms. On one side was a staircase that led to the river: A perfect spot for morning mediation or a bracing ankle dip. The water was far too ferocious and cold for a swim, coming as it was from more treacherous heights in the Himalayas.

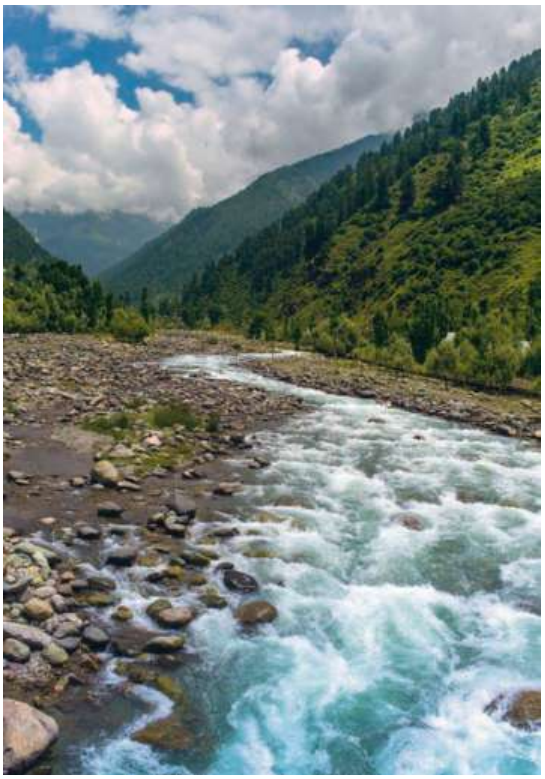
Kullan gets no phone or internet signal, presenting the perfect opportunity for a digital

MOUNTAINS

HIKING

DIGITAL DETOX

PHOTO COURTESY: THE VILLA HIMALAYA











detox. Days can be leisurely or packed with activity. A walk along Old Sonamarg Road, where the hotel is located, was a rejuvenating way to work up an appetite for dinner. The mud road is lined with mustard and maize fields and modest wooden homes with laundry flapping in the yard. We spent a wonderful evening picking dandelions, collecting smooth pebbles from a small glacial stream bed, and sniffing drops of viscous, amber-coloured resin that clung to the barks of pine trees. Outside most houses, horses chomped on fresh mountain grass, their glossy tails swishing about happily. These, we learned, were vacationing guide horses that accompany travellers on the famous Great Lakes trek, which starts a short distance from Kullan.

The folks behind The Villa Himalaya are passionate trekkers happy to organise short and longer guided hikes into the mountains, and excursions to picturesque villages nearby. The highlight of our trip was the picnic lunch by an ice-blue glacial stream. We kicked off our shoes, and tucked into a scrumptious meal, with our feet dabbling in the water. The hotel also has mountain bikes guests can use at no cost. I tried riding the geared bikes, but found they take some getting used to, so it's best to practice on Old Sonamarg Road before exploring paths less travelled.

Later that evening, we sat bundled in our shawls by the campfire—there is one almost every day—under the starry night sky while Keshav Thapa, the smiling chef, cooked up a hearty, delicious dinner. The large but homely spread began with rich tomato soup, and included saag paneer, chicken curry, mixed sabzi, yellow dal, and crisp tandoori rotis glistening with butter. Thapa is an enthusiastic cook who dishes up guilty pleasures like egg fried rice and chicken chilli as well as light, flavourful meals of grilled Himalayan trout with garlic butter. Food and sport enthusiasts can try catch their own trout between April and September when the hotel organises angling trips.

The Villa Himalaya checks all the boxes of a mountain getaway: Spectacular location, friendly but discreet service, and rooms that steer clear of the kitschy Kashmiri aesthetic that many hotels in the state favour. Mine had pinewood flooring, a flat-screen television, and the sort of heavy wooden desk that would make a writer sigh with longing. There were traditional touches—a runner with Kashmiri embroidery, a papier mâché lamp by the bedside, and a small, richly woven carpet—but they didn't overpower the space. The star in The Villa Himalaya's rooms is clearly the view. Every corner (even the shower) has mountain vistas. I fell asleep counting pine tree silhouettes on a moonlit rocky ridge, and thanks to the soothing sound of the Sind, enjoyed a deep, restful sleep.

THE VITALS

Accommodation The Villa Himalaya has 15 rooms: 3 attic rooms, 7 deluxe rooms, and 3 deluxe rooms with a balcony. It's worth splurging on the last category, to wake up to the roar of the Sind River. Rooms are well-appointed and bathrooms are reasonably posh, with glass shower cabinets, blow-driers, and bottles of aromatic moisturiser. *(www.thevillahimalaya.com; open 1 April to 15 November; doubles from ₹8,500 including all meals and walks).*

Getting there The Villa Himalaya is in Kullan village, 12 km/20 min from the hill station of Sonamarg, and 60 km/1.5 hr from Srinagar, the capital of Jammu and Kashmir. Buses ply between Srinagar and Sonamarg, but the quickest way to Kullan is by taxi. Buses are the first to be stopped in the event of a road block, which happens occasionally. The number of direct flights to Srinagar are relatively few, except from Delhi.

Spend days hiking through pine forests and picking pebbles and blooms (bottom circle) **from glacial stream beds** (left) **or simply soaking in the mountain views from your room** (top right)**; The Sind River is a rich source of Himalayan trout, and the fish sometimes makes its way to dinner spreads.**

PHOTO COURTESY: THE VILLA HIMALAYA (RIVER), VAHISHTA MISTRY (ROOM & FOOD)

THE SIMPLE LIFE

URAN OFFERS A QUICK, FUSS-FREE GETAWAY FROM HIGH-OCTANE MUMBAI | BY PIYA BOSE



Barely an hour's ferry ride from Mumbai, idyllic little Uran is a Koli fishing village once ruled by the Marathas, and later the Portuguese. The commuter ferry ride from Mumbai is bracingly perfumed by the sea breeze, with the occasional smell of fish. On the water, colourful trawlers haul in their catch, while on the shore Koli women aggressively negotiate the cost of their goods, or chase errant eels and crabs that escape from their cane baskets. There's plenty to see, even on the drive from the Mora jetty to Uran, where blue fishing nets, bright pink cottages, and green fields create a dreamy tapestry.

Uran Plaza Resort overlooks a wide expanse of the Arabian Sea, and has plenty of inviting hammocks and sunbeds strategically placed for guests to enjoy the view. The staff plies you with a choice of drinks, while the owner supplies interesting anecdotes and conversation. The 92-year-young retired Vice Admiral Pereira, runs a tight ship at his charming resort. On the porch of his home, surrounded by his loyal dogs and chirping birds, he points out the unusual hyperbolic paraboloid structure of the roof, which touches the ground at two points. On one wall, is a painting gifted by M.F. Hussain, who once stayed here. On another, hangs a photo of the owner with Indira Gandhi, whom Pereira advised on naval matters. Intricately carved antique walnut furniture basks in the ample sunlight streaming in through large glass doors.

Pereira nostalgically recounts his life in England and his adventures with the Navy during the Second World War, which took him from the North Pole to Rio de Janeiro. In 1961, he came to tranquil Uran and purchased a barren plot of nine acres for ₹9,000. Here, he planted trees to create a hideout for birds and nature lovers. The hotel offers wonderful birdwatching opportunities among the coconut and other palms, as well as walks along the beach outside the property.

For more active guests, there are large, sea-facing tennis and basketball courts. And when you've worked up an appetite, the continental and local seafood—such as the fish in tartare sauce, prawn masala, or shrimp pancakes—will complete the picture of heaven.

As I lay in a hammock, gently rocked by the wind, watching the giant red ball of the sun set over the sea, I began to succumb to the same romantic charm that inspired Mr. Pereira to give up urban life many years ago. Like him, I was tempted to call this mesmerising retreat home.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY

RELAXATION



THE VITALS

Accommodation
Uran Plaza Resort has six clean, sea-facing cottages, built in the Koli style, using white ant-resistant hardwood shipped in from the Andaman Islands. Mine had a bookshelf with a "Take one, leave one" policy. Meals are served on the cottages' porch or the lawn. *(022-27222317/18, www.hoteluranplaza.com; air-conditioned doubles ₹2,664, non air-conditioned ₹1,850, including breakfast.)*

Getting there
Mumbai is the closest airport/rail head. Uran is connected to Mumbai by regular ferries from Bhaucha Dhakka also called Ferry Wharf (6.30 a.m.-5 p.m.; 30 min-1 hr). Taxis and buses ply the 40-km route to Uran from Vashi, Navi Mumbai.

PIYA BOSE

HERITAGE BY THE SEA

ON THE KOVALAM COAST, LUXURY AND RELAXATION IN A THARAWAD HOUSE | BY LALITA IYER







HERITAGE

RELAXATION



Niraamaya Retreats Surya Samudra stands atop a cliff, overlooking two mosques—one shiny green, the other mellower—and the gentle Kovalam beach. Now a Relais & Châteaux property, the retreat is a 32-acre expanse dotted with coconut and jackfruit groves, and old-style Kerala homes, or *tharawads*. A huge stone Ganesha reclines on the lawn, setting the mood.

It would be unfair to call the accommodations "rooms"—each tharawad was once a house, and has travelled miles to be restored. In the 1970s and '80s Keralites were demolishing and selling pieces of these houses as decorative items to antique shops, as timber, even as scrap. Few people wanted traditional homes. Klaus Schleusener, the brains behind the resort, was teaching at IIT Madras at the time. He bought several old tharawads from around Kerala and gave them a new lease of life. Some are sea-facing, the rest, like mine, have partial ocean views. My room was Cinnamon, with ornate doors, carved pillars and sculptures, and planters' chairs on the porch—it could well have belonged to my great–grandfather, except that it has Wi-Fi. The furniture is colonial, the interiors distinctly modern.

The outdoor bathroom with stone tub took a little getting used to. A small note by the washbasin tells guests to put toiletries in the cupboards provided because "the squirrels can be rather playful."

Tharawads have countless windows, and each one opens to a different view. Once I had settled in, I enjoyed window-hopping in my cottage—which had one large living room, lounge area and a bath garden—catching slivers of the sea, ripe jackfruit, herb and vegetable patches, and other pretty sights. Since I was up early, I had a pre-dawn cup of tea by the sea, watching fisherfolk at work. Though the resort offers it, I wasn't in the mood for yoga by the beach, what with so many distracting hammocks.

There's not a buffet in sight at Niraamaya, as the hotel believes in a cooked-to-order system. Even jams and preserves are homemade, and the beetroot chutney, which I had with my breakfast of *idiappams*, deserves special mention. Ask the chef for the recipe, and he will happily write it out for you.

After staring long and hard at the reclining Ganesha from the vantage point of my hammock, post breakfast, I headed to the spa. The *abhyangasnana* sent me into another deep reverie,from which I eventually surfaced to enjoy a boat ride through the backwaters of the Poovar River to Golden Beach, 17 kilometres from the resort. I was lucky enough to witness the formation of an estuary where the Neyyar River, Poovar Lake, and Arabian Sea converge. On the return, I spotted an elephant named Gopi indulging in his own spa treatment with a mudpack in the backwaters. I figured he too must be revelling in Niraamaya, which, as it turns out, means a sense of well-being in Sanskrit.

THE VITALS

Accommodation Niraamaya Retreats Surya Samudra has 31 rooms and suites, in three categories. Rock Garden rooms are spacious, and ideal for families, offering a mix of the traditional with modern amenities. Heritage Classic cottages have large rooms, verdant garden views, and breezy sit-outs. Heritage Premium rooms, along the stone-edged cliff overlook the Arabian Sea and are independent twin cottages *(www.niraamaya.in; rooms from ₹7,000)*.

Getting there Niraamaya is in Kovalam, a 25 km/45-min drive from Trivandrum airport, which is connected to major Indian cities by daily flights.

PHOTO COURTESY: NIRAAMAYA RETREATS SURYA SAMUDRA

SLOW DOWN, GET AHEAD

ANANDA IS ABOUT WELLBEING AND TURNING THE FOCUS INWARD | BY NILOUFER VENKATRAMAN



Sometimes the only sound you hear in the rooms facing a valley of sal forest, is the screechy call of a peacock piercing the still afternoon air.

Sal forests sweep down the hillside all the way to the River Ganga far below. On its banks, 17 kilometres downhill from the balcony of my valley-facing room at Ananda in the Himalayas, I can see the spiritual centre of Rishikesh. Splendidly located in a 100-acre forest on the edge of the Tehri-Garhwal mountains in Narendranagar, Uttarakhand, the property is secluded and verdant.

I'm due for a consultation with an Ayurvedic doctor in a few minutes. I'm not ill, but at Ananda, where I am on a short getaway, that session is mandatory. With my check-in that morning I was handed a sheet listing the week's health-enhancing activities.

The first thrill of this trip started before I left home. My reservation confirmation slip suggested I travel light, as white kurta-pyjamas are provided for the duration of a guest's stay. It took away the stress out of packing and planning. Frivolous as it may sound, for me it was great not to have to bother with what to wear to dinner, to sleep, or anywhere else for three days. Additionally, I won't have to unpack or do laundry when I return.

Window boxes bursting with ferns line the hallway and staircase as I head to the hotel's sprawling spa block. The doctor declares I am of *pitta* dosha and encourages me to consume the set pitta meals at the restaurant, to balance my energies. These turn out to be a combination of Indian and other cuisines: A meal could, for instance, have a small cup of lentil soup and a salad, beetroot risotto, and poached pear.

Then I get an Ananda Fusion massage. With 24 therapy rooms the spa is the hotel's centrepiece and the highlight of any stay. This is where Dawa, a massage therapist with magical hands, sends me into a calm space where I begin to think about me. Thoughts about work and chores recede to my mental back burner. Looking at my health I see what needs to be fixed. By the end of the first day itself, I start listing what is wrong with my lifestyle, my body, my everyday routine. As she pampers me with a blend of massage techniques including deep tissue, Swedish and Thai, and applies hot poultices

WELLNESS

MOUNTAINS

PHOTO COURTESY: ANANDA IN THE HIMALAYAS

of sea salt alongside, I begin to understand why most of the guests I had met that morning said they were repeat customers.

However, Ananda isn't your regulation spa where you pick from a menu of spa offerings based on what sounds good to you. Every stay package comes with pre-designed therapies that are formulated to suit the duration of stay and address the individual's health objectives based on the Ayurvedic doctor's assessment.

Ananda takes wellness seriously and while nothing is enforced, guests are encouraged to avoid non-vegetarian food (though it is available) and switch to a healthy lifestyle. The spa's week-long detox programme is very popular, and if you join it, be prepared to be thoroughly detoxed. A gentleman on the table next to me at dinner was complaining profusely that he was still hungry after his set meal had been served, and that he craved things that just weren't permitted. That said, on a getaway package no one forces you to toe the line, though temptations are kept out of sight. I didn't, for instance, spot any butter at the breakfast counter that morning; it was lined with healthy options.

Even those who don't like early morning yoga classes can make the session starting at a leisurely 8.30 a.m. And they should, not only because the location amidst woods is spectacular, but also because after an hour of yoga stretches I feel totally energised. Avoiding the golf carts that ferry guests around I decide to walk everywhere I need to go on the sprawling property for the rest of my stay.

A few days of this and tranquillity sets in. One of my favourite spots on the property is the wooden deck, surrounded by trees, attached to the restaurant. Even on a hot afternoon in May I find a shady seat under the umbrella where a light breeze keeps me cool. Although this is very much a luxury resort, Ananda is understated in its appearance and décor. Though the hotel does depend on water brought in from outside, I am happy to see that it has its own drinking water filtration system. Drinking water comes from beautiful glass bottles saving, I'm guessing, at least 500 disposable plastic bottles from coming up to this Himalayan idyll every day.

After a wild rose exfoliating salt scrub on day two, I check my schedule and head for a yoga nidra session. There, a gentle young man who practices the Bihar school of yoga, takes me through a routine that slows down the mental chatter even more.

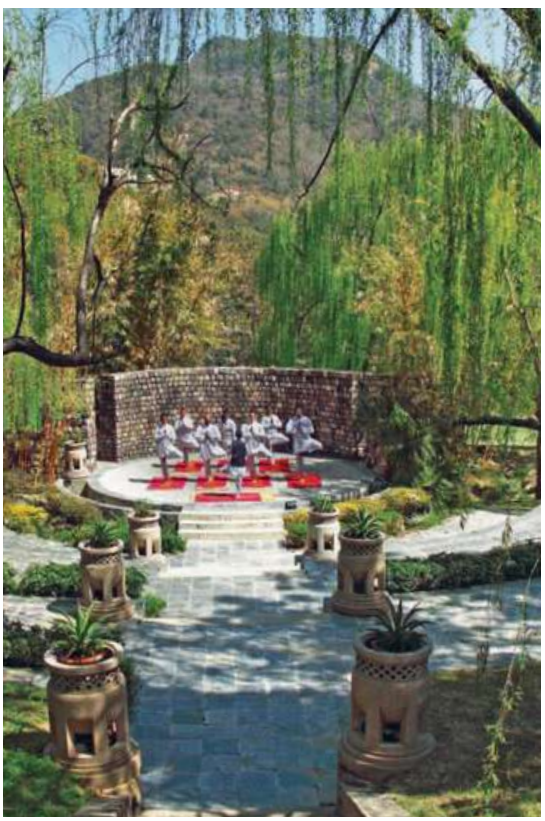
For me the stay at Ananda was about focussing on myself. In our everyday lives, filled with lists of things to complete, our bodies regularly send out signals, telling us things we need to heed. At Ananda, after a long time, I stopped to listen. And what I heard wasn't sweet or pleasant. Even though I was there for a getaway rather than a formal wellness programme, I felt the calm and the unwinding. The pervading wellness mantra put me in the mode to do something about improving my health, to attempt to fix and cleanse my system, and reclaim a sense of wellbeing.



THE VITALS

Accommodation
Wellness programmes require a minimum stay of 7 days. Shorter getaway packages start at 2 nights. Packages from ₹30,400 per night for two, includes spa experiences, breakfast and dinner *(www.anandaspa.com)*.

Getting there
Dehradun is connected to Delhi by daily direct flights. Its Jolly Grant airport is a 45-minute drive from Ananda, in the village of Narendranagar, 17 km from Rishikesh.







The spa (top right) **is the focal point of any visit to Ananda. Many of the therapists are trained at the hotel's own school, the Ananda Spa Institute in Hyderabad; Stress management is one the resort's primary goals and yoga** (left) **is an important component of the plan. All guests can benefit from the yogic breathing techniques and from personalised attention from instructors** (bottom right) **during yoga classes.**

PHOTO COURTESY: ANANDA IN THE HIMALAYAS



DRAGON'S BLOOD TREES

SOCOTRA ISLAND, YEMEN

Groves of dragon's blood trees on Socotra Island in Yemen seem to be right out of a fantasy novel. Socotra is one of four islands of the Socotra archipelago about 350 kilometres southeast of Yemen's coast in the Arabian Sea. Its landscape is as curious as it is remote. The unique dragon's blood tree is 10-15 metres tall and gets its name from the colour of its sap: a rich, red substance described as medicinal dragon blood in Socotra's legends. Towards the treetop, the trunk erupts in vein-like branches that yield spiky green leaves.

This island cluster is called the "Galápagos of the Indian Ocean" and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is said to have evolved into a world of its own after it separated from Africa millions of years ago. Its magnificent biodiversity includes 825 plant species, and a whopping 90 per cent of its reptiles are endemic. Its other well-kept secrets include gigantic limestone caves, azure seas, sandy beaches, and the lofty Hajhir mountains. Socotra's wonders are best experienced between October and May. Surfers head there in the monsoon, between June and August. Socotra's capital Hadibo is a three-hour flight from the Yemeni capital Sana'a.
—Kareena Gianani





JOHN LUND/BLEND IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES



AVENUE DU BAOBAB, **MORONDAVA, MADAGASCAR**

About 20 kilometres outside the idyllic seaside town of Morondava, Madagascar, gigantic baobab trees seem to reach for the skies. Most visitors throng to the town just to walk along the stretch of dirt road called the Avenue du Baobab, and witness the 20-25 leviathans which are at least 80 feet tall. Morondava was once a prosperous town in Madagascar's Sakalava kingdom until the French colonised the island in 1886. Today, its main draws are the beautifully adorned tombs of the Menabe tribe and the stately baobabs that cast a spell on passers-by, especially at sunset.

Hundreds of years old, these Grandidier's baobabs were once part of a thick forest which was destroyed for farmland. It was only in 2007 that the Madagascar government marked the stretch as a protected area. Grandidier's baobab is prized for its pulpy fruit and sturdy bark. It can also battle acute water scarcity by storing water in its trunk, another sign of how it has withstood the ravages of time in Madagascar.

In addition to the Avenue du Baobab, the Kirindy forest (60 kilometres north of Morondava), is a haven for nature lovers and home to the fossa, a cat-like carnivore endemic to the island nation.

—Kareena Gianani





KEREN SU/LONELY PLANET IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES



THE GREAT BANYAN TREE

HOWRAH, WEST BENGAL

From afar Howrah's Great Banyan Tree at Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Indian Botanic Garden (or simply the Indian Botanic Garden as locals call it) looks like a forest. A closer look reveals the mindboggling fact that it is indeed just one tree with 3,772 aerial roots. The wild, sprawling wonder is approximately 300 years old and has one of the widest canopies in the world. It is spread over about a kilometre, with a canopy of 18,900 square metres, but it has no trunk. The tree endured two cyclones in the late 1800s and its trunk was removed due to a fungal attack in 1925. Despite this, the banyan has stood its ground and is marvelled at by visitors walking the road built around it.

The 273-acre botanic garden in which The Great Banyan tree is found was established in 1787 and now nurtures over 14,000 trees, plants, and creepers. The Great Banyan Tree however occupies centre stage. Another fascinating tree in this garden is the double coconut, the sole specimen of the female tree of this threatened palm species in India. Its seed weighs a staggering 25 kilos and it yields fruit, which look like conjoined coconuts, weighing 45 kilos.

—Kareena Gianani





LEONID PLOTKIN/ALAMY/INDIAPICTURE

STRANGE PLANET

SNIPPETS FROM OUR FASCINATING WORLD



Castrillo de Murcia, Spain

DENIS DOYLE/STRINGER/GETTY IMAGES

LEAPS OF FAITH At the El Colacho Festival in Castrillo de Murcia, Spain, men dress up as the devil and jump over rows of babies lying in the street to chase away bad luck.

MERRY... FISTFIGHTING On December 25 at the Takanakuy festivals in the Peruvian cities of Santo Tomás, Cusco, and Lima, locals punch each other in an effort to settle old grudges.

TO THE POINT One of the shortest geographic terms you'll find anywhere is the Swedish name for river or stream, which is the one-letter word "Å" (pronounced O).

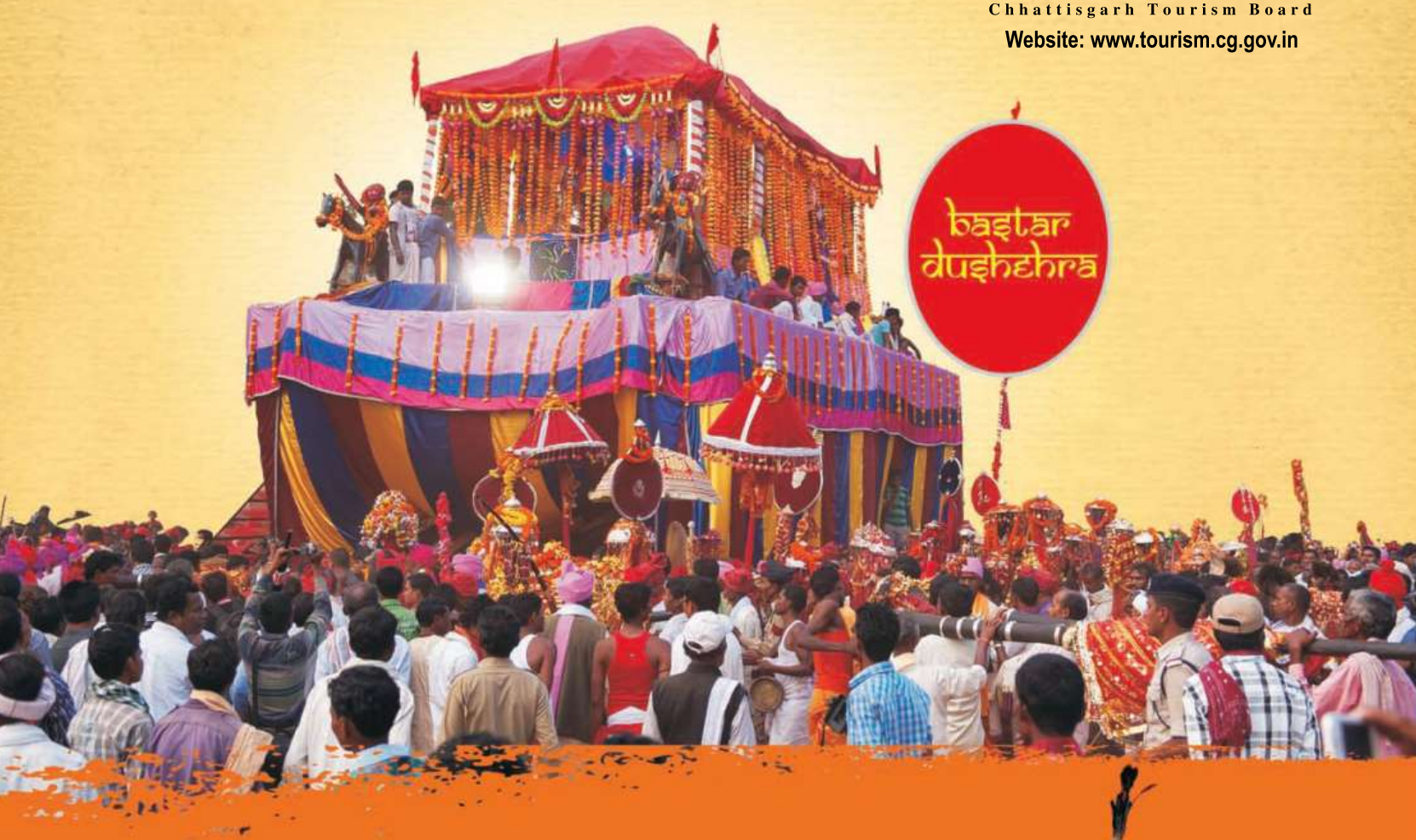
BEAUTY BOAT British Columbia's Kootenay Lake Ferry is regarded as the world's longest free ferry ride. The 35-minute lake crossing is definitely one of the most scenic.

DON'T SHAKE ON IT Visitors to the five crypts under Dublin's St. Michan's Church can touch the appendages of a mummy.

AN AFFAIR TO REMEMBER Every Valentine's Day, a few lucky couples get a free wedding at the Empire State Building in New York City. Hundreds of lovebirds enter the contest with tales of their courtship.

—Jenna Schnuer and Paul Martin

Chhattisgarh
full of surprises
Chhattisgarh Tourism Board
Website: www.tourism.cg.gov.in



A festival that lasts for 75 days. Memories of it last for a lifetime.

Bastar Dushehra in Chhattisgarh is a 75 days long festival orchestrated to honour the many native Goddesses.
It presents a unique opportunity, particularly for tourists, to witness breath-taking feast by the tribal community. The high-point of this festivity is a massive chariot built by the locals which is towed by over 400 people. One can witness various interesting rituals during the festival. It's an experience that'll stay with you forever.









Toll Free No.: 1-800-102-6415 (8 am to 8 pm) Follow us on: Gochhattisgarh Gochhattisgarh Gochhattisgarh



Breguet, the innovator.

Invention of the shock-protection device, 1790

Inspired by "subscription watches," the Tradition 7027BR model daringly symbolizes the Breguet art of watchmaking through a subtle play on transparency effects and an eminent contemporary architectural design. It highlights one of Breguet's most important inventions, the *pare-chute*, designed to protect the balance pivots in case of impact, it was the forerunner of all modern shock-absorbing devices. History is still being written...

www.breguet.com/inventions

Chennai: The Helvetica 044 28464095/96 **Kolkata:** Exclusive Lines 033 22820626 **Hyderabad:** Meena Jewellers 040 23237170
New Delhi: Johnson Watch Co, Connaught Place 011 41513110/41513121 – Johnson Watch Co, South Extn 011 24642299/41646766
Mumbai: Ethos Summit 022 66151308/09 – Time Avenue 022 26515757/5858

BREGUET INDIA NEW DELHI +91 11 4609 2907 – WWW.BREGUET.COM